LOOK! "THE IRON TRUNK MYSTERY; OR, KEENEYES' GREATEST CASE"
ANOTHER THRILLING "KEENEYES" DETECTIVE STORY NEXT WEEK

THE CHICAGO LEDGER

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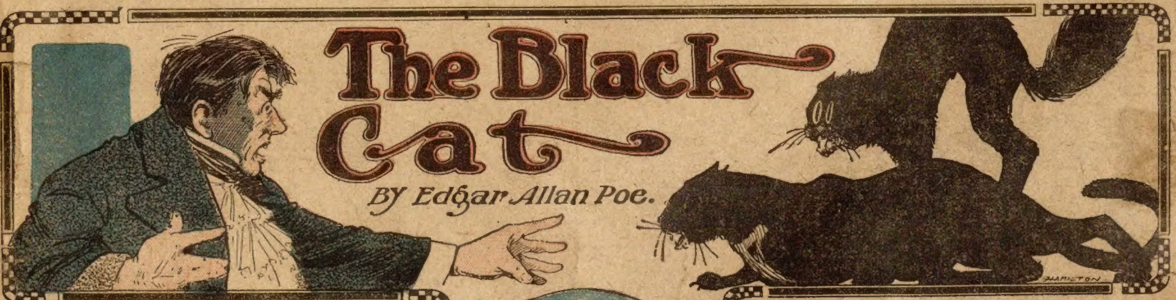


The Black Cat

By Edgar Allan Poe.

FOR the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But tomorrow I die, and today I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me they presented little but horror—to many they will seem less terrible than baroques. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and in my manhood I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere man.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever serious upon this point, and I mention that matter at all for no better reason than that it happens just now to be remembered.

Pluto—this was the cat's name—was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted in this manner for several years, during which my general temperament and character—through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance—had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of [illegible] feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my [illegible] At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets of course were [illegible] to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected but ill-used them. [illegible] Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or [illegible] the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. [illegible] my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length [illegible] Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—[illegible] Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill-temper.

One night, returning home much intoxicated from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided by presence. I seized him, when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed at once to take its flight from my body, and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fiber of my frame. I took from my waistcoat pocket a penknife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning—when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch—I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty, but it was at best a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of perverseness. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the invisible primary factulties or sentiments which give direction to the character of man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action for no other reason than because he knows he should not? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is law, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only—that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree; hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart, hung it because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offense; hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it, if such a thing were possible, even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the most merciful and most terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforth to despair.

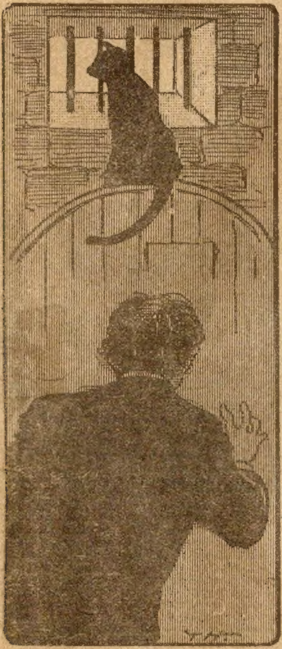
I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts, and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls with one exception had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here in great measure resisted the action of the fire, a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words "Strange!" "Singular!" and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in bas relief upon the white surface the figure of a gigantic cat. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous. There was a rope about the animal's neck.

When I first beheld this apparition—for I could scarcely regard it as less—my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd, by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown through an open window into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which with the flames and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat, and during this period there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

One night, as I sat half-stupefied in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of gin or of rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat—a very large one—fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

Upon my touching him he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it—knew nothing of it—had never seen it before.


It was a black cat.

I continued my caresses, and when I prepared to go home the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so, occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated, but—I know not how or why it was—its evident fondness for myself disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike or otherwise violently ill-use it, but gradually—very gradually—I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence as from the breath of a pestilence.

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed in a high degree that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber in this manner to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly—let me confess it at once—by absolute dread of the beast.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil—and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own—yes, even in this felon's cell, I am almost ashamed to own—that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me had been heightened by one of the merest chimeras it would be possible to conceive. My wife had called my attention more than once to the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed. The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite, but by slow degrees—degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my reason struggled to reject as fanciful—it had at length assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name—and for this above all I loathed and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster had I dared—it was now, I say, the image of a hideous—of a ghastly thing—of the gallows!—O, mournful and terrible engine of horror and of crime—of agony and of death!

And now was I indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere humanity. And a brute beast—whose fellow I had contemptuously destroyed—a brute beast to work out for me—for me a man, fashioned in the image of the high God—so much of insufferable woe! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and in the latter I started hourly from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight—an incarnate nightmare that I had no power to shake off—incumbent eternally upon my heart!

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates—the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while from the sudden frequent and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abondoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers.

One day she accompanied me upon some household errand into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep steps, and nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an ax, and forgetting in my wrath the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal, which of course would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded by the interference into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the ax in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot without a groan.

This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith and with entire deliberation to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments and destroying them by fire. At another I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well in the yard—about packing it in a box, as if merchandise, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar—as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection caused by a false chimney or fireplace, that had been filled up and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect anything suspicious.

And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crowbar I easily dislodged the bricks, and having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that position, while with little trouble I relaid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brickwork. When I had finished I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself—"Here at last, then, my labor has not been in vain."

My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness, for I had at length firmly resolved to put it to death. Had I been able to meet with it at the moment there could have been no doubt of its fate, but it appeared that the crafty animal had been alarmed at the violence of my previous anger, and forebore to present itself in my present mood. It is impossible to describe or to imagine the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night—and thus for one night at least since its introduction into the house I soundly and tranquilly slept, aye, slept even with the burden of murder upon my soul!

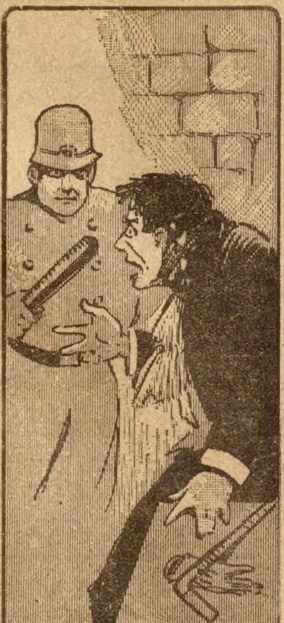
The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a free man. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises forever! I should behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. Some few inquiries had been made, but these had been readily answered. Even a search had been instituted—but of course nothing was to be discovered. I looked upon my future felicity as secured.

Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came very unexpectedly into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises. Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever. The officers bade me accompany them in their search. They left no nook or corner unexplored. At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. I quivered not in a muscle. My heart beat calmly as that of one who slumbers in innocence. I walked the cellar from end to end. I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied, and prepared to depart. The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness.

"Gentlemen," I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, "I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the by, gentlemen, this—this is a very well-constructed house." (In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.) "I may say an excellently well-constructed house. These walls—are you going, gentlemen?—these walls are solidly put together;" and here, through the mere frenzy of bravado; I rapped heavily with a cane which I held in my hand upon that portion of the brickwork behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.

But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the arch-fiend! No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!—by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman—a howl—a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!


One long, loud, and continuous scream!

* * *

A Wrong Deduction.

"Lady outside to see you, Mister Allen," said the office boy. The bookkeeper looked up and the other bookkeepers smiled.

"Where is she, Willie?" the bookkeeper asked. "What does she look like?"

"She's a peacherino," said the office boy with enthusiasm. "Gee, but she's purty, an' dressed." Mr. Allen smoothed his hair at the washstand, and, followed by the envious glances of his fellow-workers, went out to the lobby.

The lady certainly was a beauty, but Mr. Allen had never seen her before, though his social acquaintances were many.

"Is this Mr. Allen?" the lady asked, smiling so as to show a perfect set of teeth. Mr. Allen bowed.

"I have," said the lady, fumbling in her handbag, "a bill from Smith Wilmerding, the tailors—"

"Yes, yes," gasped Mr. Allen. "I've overlooked that—I'll send a check at once—thank you so much for calling."

"I felt sure it had been overlooked," smiled the lady; "good morning, Mr. Allen."

Next day the office boy poked his head into the bookkeeping department.

"Lady out there to see Mr. Matthews," he said. Mr. Matthews arose like a jumping jack and ran to the vault.

"Tell her I'm not here," he said earnestly; "get rid of her some way. I don't want to see her. Allen, I'll bet a week's salary it's the same one. She's got us all spotted."

Then the office boy went out wonderingly. To the lady in the hall he explained as best he could.

"You can't see him, Miss," he said; "he's got a' appendix. They took him to th' hospital yesterday."

"But he called on me last night," the lady protested. "What can it mean?"

"I don't know," said the office boy; "but he's sick an' busy an' ain't got time to talk to you. He's at the hospital besides."

"Well, I must say," said the lady indignantly, "that this is very queer."

"Did you get rid of her," Mr. Matthews inquired.

"Sure I did," said the office boy. "She tried to bluff me by saying you'd called on her last night, but I told her you was at a hospital an' didn't have time to talk to her—"

"You did!" shrieked Mr. Matthews. "O, you thick-skulled imp—get out of the way there; let me use the 'phone."

* * *

Her Match.

Judge Simeon E. Baldwin, in one of his speeches, said, apropos of the law:

"The law, properly understood, is just and right. It appears just and right to the average man. If it isn't so, it is soon changed.

"Sometimes the law seems unjust for the reason that it isn't comprehended. Take the case of the woman prisoner before Sir Edward Coke.

"This woman appeared in court with her hat on. The judge said sternly:

"'A woman may be covered in church, but not when arraigned in a court of justice.'

"To this the woman replied:

"'It seems singular that I may wear my hat in the presence of God, but not in the presence of man.'

"And she would appear, in her legal ignorance, to have got the better of the argument until Sir Edward Coke retorted:

"'It isn't singular at all. Man, with his weak intellect, cannot discover secrets known to God, and therefore, [illegible] investigating truth, the court must [illegible] all obstacles put aside. Accordingly it [illegible] fitting that the prisoner's hat be [illegible] moved, and with it the shadow that [illegible] casts upon her face.'"

* * *

Figured the Wrong Way.

"Two old salts who had spent most of their lives on fishing smacks had an argument one day as to which was the better mathematician," said George C. Wiedenmayer the other day. "Finally the captain of their ship proposed the following problem which each would try to work out: 'If a fishing crew caught 500 pounds of cod and brought their catch to port and sold it at 6 cents a pound how much would they receive for the fish?'

"Well, the two old fellows got to work, but neither seemed able to master the intricacies of the deal in fish and were unable to get any answer.

"At last old Bill turned to the captain and asked him to repeat the problem. The captain started off: 'If a fishing crew caught 500 pounds of cod and—'

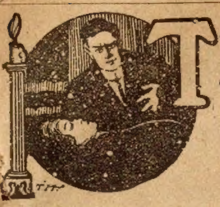
"'Wait a moment,' said Bill. 'Is it codfish they caught?'

"'Yep,' said the captain.

"'Darn it all,' said Bill. 'No wonder I couldn't get an answer. Here I've been figuring on salmon all the time'"

* * *

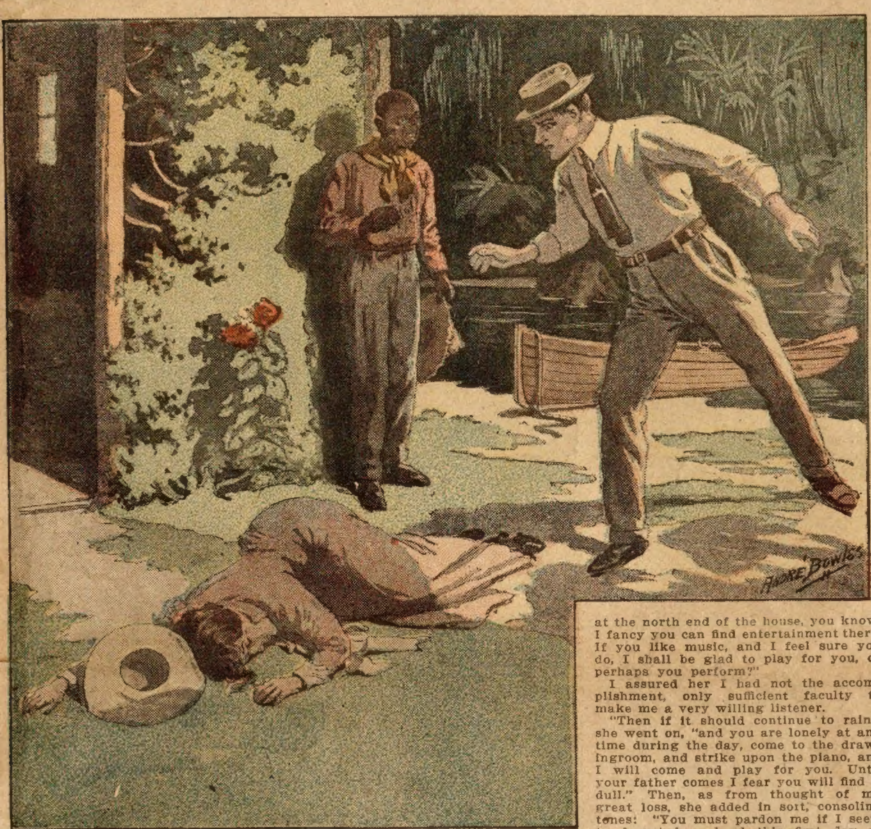
The average man doesn't think he [illegible] better than other men; he merely thin[illegible] they are worse than he is.



TRANCE or DEATH

or A Doctor's Mystic Power

By ALVAH MILTON KERR



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CHAPTER IV.

THE sun, breaking weakly through the rain, sent in a changing, uncertain light, which glimmered against the samovar, against her hair, the silver and delicate wares of the table and sideboard, then died away. She spoke of the rain, of my journey from the North, and with wistful look and tone wished that I might feel welcome at home. There was something even in her air which mutely asked for sympathy and comradeship. Ah, if she but knew me!

I got through the meal hurriedly, stumblingly, and rose to go. As I turned away a sudden impulse checked me. I stopped and extended my hand to her.

"Forgive me so little courtesy," I faltered; "I am not myself. Unlike most men of my years, I had but one real friend, my mother. I have no words to describe the blow death has dealt me in taking her from me. I had thought to find her here, but all is changed. I do not even know who you are that have her place, save that you seem my father's wife. But I feel that you are considerate and good. I shall believe you so, and for whatever seems odd or questionable of taste in your coming so early into the place made vacant here, I shall try to believe it rather my father's eagerness to possess one so beautiful than folly and unseemly haste in you."

As I bowed over her hand her color came and went, and as I ceased speaking tears were gathering in her eyes.

"I am grateful for your confidence," she replied. "I was at once unhappy when I realized who you were, lest you should judge me harshly. I know it would not seem a thing unnatural in you to question my conduct in entering as a wife so soon into a home made empty by death. But, oh, sir, I had much cause! A bitter trouble pushed me on! I was not—I was not wholly free to choose, to seek delay!"

Her mouth trembled and she drew the back of her hand across her forehead in sudden pitiful confusion. I stood mute and vaguely wondering at her, yet feeling, as at the base of everything, my own trouble prickling ceaselessly.

"As for my history," she went on, "it is little and sad enough. I beg that you will not care to hear it, but believe it honorable! Please believe it honorable! I do not feel at liberty to tell you of it wholly or I should do so gladly, gladly!"

I bowed assent, murmuring such gracious words as seemed fitting, and turned to go.

"My name is Marguerite. I hope it will please you to call me that," she said. "I am not yet quite used to being called Mrs. Stanwood. Perhaps I shall like it better when age gives me dignity sufficient for the title."

A sorrowful sort of smile hovered about her lips. I also tried to smile as I assured her I should find pleasure in doing her bidding since she was now my mother. But even so light a phrase as it sounded it was a sudden harrowing lie to me. This lovely girl, but yesterday, by law, was my mother. Now she was what? What should she become to me? An avenging angel haunting all my life's dreams? Or something clasped to my breast at least to burn my soul out, being so sweet yet so foully won? But why should a thought like that fly through my mind, save that even so early in our intercourse in the very morning of my lost innocence, God should bring her beauty and her purity to work revenge upon me?

As I turned to go she said: "You will find horses in the stables if you wish to ride; order the servants as you like. The boat lies just above the bridge, if you care to row. Indoors there is the library, though no doubt you are far more familiar with it than I. The doctor's laboratory is in the little building at the north end of the house, you know. I fancy you can find entertainment there. If you like music, and I feel sure you do, I shall be glad to play for you, or perhaps you perform?"

I assured her I had not the accomplishment, only sufficient faculty to make me a very willing listener.

"Then if it should continue to rain," she went on, "and you are lonely at any time during the day, come to the drawingroom, and strike upon the piano, and I will come and play for you. Until your father comes I fear you will find it dull." Then, as from thought of my great loss, she added in soft, consoling tones: "You must pardon me if I seem to forget how hard this first day at home must be to you. I wish so much to soften it, perhaps I am too eager. No doubt you will prefer to be alone. I have known that grief which is beyond all human help; even yet I am very sad sometimes, and feel very much alone." Again she drew the back of her slim hand across her forehead in that troubled, appealing fashion.

I could not easily find words to say, and stammering a bungled assurance of sympathy and gratitude, I turned away. I ascended the stair and came out upon the upper gallery and walked up and down. The rain, like a thousand fairy mallets, beat dreamily upon the roof; out among the glistening leaves of the tulip trees and sweet bays there went a dull tapping as of velvety finger-tips; the distant Gulf was muffled in swaying curtains of misty gauze.

As I paced up and down but one sentence of all she had said remained strongly in my mind. It was as something burned there. "Until your father returns you will find it dull, I fear!" Ah, biting, bitter irony! sharp shaft sped by the bow of her tender lips, yet pointed as with fire! "Until your father returns you will find it dull!" Oh, God, should I not rather find madness, or the grave through self-destruction?

As I walked back and forth along the gallery that morning after the tragedy upon the bridge, the mournfulness which is always in slowly falling rain added its burden to the desolation which lay upon me. A great heart sickness and sense of being destroyed and undone oppressed me. Had the whole scene been raked with storm, trees uprooted, the ground flailed with hail, and the air shocked with thunder bolts, I should have found, I think, a certain element of relief in it. But that dreamy patter, tender, doleful, accusing! Every memory of my life flocked into the ruined house of my soul and filled it with sounds of weeping!

At the end of an hour endurance failed. I descended, and following a path through the wet grass into the orchard north of the mansion, came to the tool house. Along one side of this was a row of rooms, ceiled with dressed pine, for storing fruits and grain. One of these I had used for a study and work room throughout my boyhood, when at home. Near a window I had a desk, and on the other side a bench, with saws, planes and other tools, and at the end a small foot lathe and a jig-saw.

I found the room much as I had left it. Evidently my mother had kept it carefully in memory of me. The sight of it touched me deeply. Here I had spent many happy, innocent hours, untroubled of my father or that great heedless outer world, which to me then was an unrealized dream.

Upon brackets along the wall lay my fishing rods, and depending from hooks below them hung my rubber thigh boots and a coat of oiled cloth. These latter I put on, for they had been large and ill-fitting when purchased, as such things commonly are; then I hurried to the river, pushed the boat forth, spread out the oars, and sent the little craft swiftly down the stream.

A hot fever was in my blood; a wild yearning to know the appalling, absolute truth, to drink disaster to the dregs. I must see; I must prove that which remorse repeated to my fancy with ceaseless iteration; I must obey that revengeful law of blasting fascination which nature lays on him who kills. I could not refuse, though the task had at its end a horror and trepidation inexpressible in words. I must find the bleeding thing and give it sepulture somewhere, if only in the sands washed up by the sea.

The rain fell soft and steadily as I rowed. Throughout the woods stretched a misty vapor; the trees and bramble seemed meshed together in it as with a gray spider web. The spreading live oaks here and there leaned over the water, dripping moisture upon me from their ragged beards. On every side I peered with prying, fearful eyes. Ah, he who has hunted only to kill, be he man or beast, knows not what it is to hunt for the killed thing that haunts him! In the one is that strange joy which springs of yearning savagery, in the other savagery's scorching legacy.

Nature had given me a tender heart; that I believe it fair to say. From earliest childhood wrong done to me, or to my friends, or to the smallest, meanest thing that lived, filled me with resentful ire. I know that I would have given my life willingly that day, as I rowed forward through the rain, had such sacrifice brought back the man I disliked to life again, and purged my soul of that which I felt to be murder's uncleansable blot.

I at last must find him. Perhaps I should bring him back to Magnolia House and lay him at his young wife's feet, and take whatever shame or pain the law dealt out to me, or expiate my sin by my own hand. Thus my thoughts went, taking many black fantastic shapes, as hour after hour I rowed to and fro.

In the blue-gray drizzle objects along the shores took on a ghostly, forbidding cast. Here a black log floating near the bank, there a cypress root, swaying in the water, would make my blood suddenly run cold as ice. Throughout the gloomy woods on either hand there went no wind or bird voice. All was silence. The tide was flowing in, and meeting the current from the inland, gave the river a heaped up look along its center, breaking away toward the shores in countless eddies. These eddies I followed feverously, feeling my pulses leap fast and chill at sight of aught that resembled the dreadful object of my search. A cold dew of horror wet my forehead all the way.

Four miles or more below Magnolia House the woods widened on either hand. When the tide fell the waters of the river plowed through a well defined channel to the sea; when the tide rose against the land fifty thousand acres of cypress swamp received its waters into bayous which were as a million veins. Into that bewildering maze of miniature canals, shut, in most part, forever from the sun by vine tangled trees, more than one unthinking hunter had rowed with eager, expectant eye, and never looked on human face again. A few knew it wonderfully well, and many knew its main courses and the larger islands which lay in it, but no man could hope to know it to the last watery loop and turn, for its liquid ramifications seemed as complex and infinite as the capillary system of the human frame.

The swamp was called the Dead-lanes. Many of its green aisles I had known from boyhood, but there were thousands more of these liquid lanes into which I had never ventured at any time.

It seemed improbable that the one I sought should have drifted into this labyrinth of watery byways, since his body doubtless went outward with the tide. Still I felt it impossible to leave the ground unsearched. I would at least pass through the bayous debouching upon the main channel; so, after descending the river along the left shore for a mile or more and returning along the right, I drove the boat into the mouth of one of the larger bayous, and was immediately as one buried from that open, natural world which all men know.

A thick, greenish gloom hung in these fantastic corridors. Objects were visible, not in detail, but in masses. Overhead was a roof of vines and leafage through which actual sunbeams never fell, and above that the misty curtains of the rain. Had there been sunshine beating upon that wondrous canopy of leaves, or had I possessed a torch I could have seen my way. As it was, I knew at once that if I proceeded the attempt must terminate only in disaster.

Yet, would that not be best? Why not row onward and lose myself utterly? The thought fascinated me. I let the oars fall limp, and sat thinking. In that place of dead silence and preternatural gloom my mind seemed to burrow in darkness like an eyeless mole. I put my hand over the side of the boat and touched the water; it felt soft and pleasant. What a grateful, tender bed it would make for a weary, ruined man! I looked about at the shadowy ranks of cypress trees, at the vague, heaped up tangle of writhing roots, up at the dim vault of greenery and began to long inexpressibly for oblivion.

The boat drifted softly, and at length rested its prow against the distorted knees of a huge cypress. As I sat in that strange half stupor of remorse and weariness, thinking of kindly, easeful death, I regarded nothing that was external. Suddenly I caught up the oars; that fatal moment in which all that is normal in man breaks, had come upon me. A resolve, which in its strongest expression is but insanity, had seized me. The brooding lethargy was gone. I would push onward into the watery labyrinth, and in some deep pool, where mortal eye might never know of my defeat, end all!

As I took up the oars and swung the boat away from the cypress roots, a slim, hideous snake suddenly slipped from the prow and came toward me. Its eyes glistened like beads of jet, and in the gray-green gloom I saw faintly a forked tongue spring from a scarlet mouth. With a cry of horror I struck at it. With almost inconceivable rapidity it turned and darted to the prow of the boat, then back again, and across my knees and into the water.

In one breath the native instinct for life and safety leaped through my frame. To lie even in death among such hideous things! To be a part of all this squirming, reeking ooze! Oh, frightful thought! With a thrill of terror and repulsion I laid the boat about and sent it swiftly out into the open stream again.

Ah, as I sit here now and look across the years to that sad chapter of my life, and the strange marvels which befell me after it, I am touched with pity for the hapless youth, who, that day, from intended self-destruction, turned again to seek for that which he had destroyed. I pity him as if he were other than myself, and with far more feeling than would seem natural in any one who reads, I follow him.

I sat panting for some minutes, I remember after the boat lay in the open stream. I had not been far from death; I had hung for a little over the great pool of eternal silence and watched my reflection there. It left me trembling. I wet my forehead with the water out of the stream, and looked up to the sky like one awakening from a distempered dream. The clouds had broken away above me, leaving apparently vast blue holes into the limitless ether. I knew not what hour it was; I had not thought of food or time. By my watch it was now 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The rain had ceased falling. I had some hours yet for the search before night fell. I turned the boat toward the sea.

Hour after hour I pulled forward looking narrowly on every side. At last I dropped out from between the phalanxes of cypress and floated in the open gulf. Miles beyond me lay the keys, serrate with turted palms and a hundred forms and shades of green. All the western half of the sky was clear, with the sun at its fartherest base sinking into a sea of golden ether. My task seemed hopeless.

For a little time I drifted to and fro, spent, nerveless, suffering. I felt as one feels who has no further need of life. And yet, I must live; I knew it now. That hour in the ghastly Dead-lanes had taught me this.

I turned the boat and entered the river's broad mouth. Grief, remorse, labor, lack of food and lack of sleep had sapped me sadly. Besides, that most draining of all influences, discouragement, seemed to invade every bone and muscle of my frame with weakness. Before I had pulled half way to Magnolia House the moon was pushing its pale light in among the live oak boughs. I saw, without interest, the pendent moss hanging in it like fringes of silver. The spots of light upon the river's bosom were as drifting, ethereal lilies, but I cared not. I toiled slowly, brokenly, as one might going toward his own death.

It must have been within an hour of midnight when I dragged my feet in through the gate at Magnolia Place; still, the lower rooms were aglow with light. As I came up to the great porch I started. Marguerite was standing there.

I could not see her face clearly, for the light was at her back, but the glow dwelt up me, and I heard a strong concern in her voice as she said:

"Oh, how bad, how ill you look! You have been gone all day in the rain! You must be very hungry, are you not?"

"I am very tired," I said, and sat down upon the edge of the gallery floor and turned my face out toward the night.

"Mr. Stanwood has not yet come home," she said, after a pause.

God help me, how well I knew that!

"Won't you come in the house?" she went on. "I had Sam keep the fire going so that when you and your father should return you might have something warm to eat." She spoke in a cheery voice, yet with a note of wonder and concern.

"Thank you," I said. "You are very good. I will go to the tool house and put off these wet things, and then come in."

Ten minutes later I climbed the gallery stair, and entering my room made such a toilet as I could. When I stood before the glass I saw a strange face in it, pale, strained, seemingly years older than a week before. Surely a hard storm had beaten over me! I went to the dining hall slowly, and sat down to table conscious of a strange, dreamy sort of suffering. I was so weary my throat ached, and to speak was like lifting a ponderous load. The food I put into my mouth seemed at first to have no flavor, then suddenly I began to eat with a frightful relish. Nature, drained to the verge of paralysis, asserted itself. In the ecstasy of satisfying the clamor of my outraged body, I forgot the beautiful girl sitting across the table from me.

"You haven't eaten anything before since you came here. Not a half dozen bites. You don't know how glad I am to see you eat."

I looked up; across the white, glistening board I saw her beaming face. My trouble flowed back upon me. For a few minutes I had forgotten all in the sweetness of hushing the wild cry of hunger in me. For a while after that I ate on more slowly.

"You were out rowing?" she said.

"Yes," I answered. "I felt lonely, and went down the river to its mouth. I ventured into the swamp a little way and came near losing myself."

"It is a weird, wonderful place," she said. "The doctor took me there some weeks ago. He has a sort of little house there, on one of the islands; he called it a sheel, I remember; a Scotch name, I think. He often goes there to experiment upon the little creatures of the swamp. He calls it vivisection; I think it very cruel." She suddenly paused and looked at me, a questioning cast in her starry eyes.

"I wonder," she went on, "if he has not gone there. Possibly he went yesterday morning instead of going to Port Garcia. Sometimes he rides down to the cabin of a hunter named Cackler, I think he said, and takes the man's boat into the swamp. The man lives on the west side of the river almost at the edge of the swamp. A trail leads down to it from the main Garcia road, he said."

She paused and thought a moment. "He may have remained over night at Cackler's or possibly at the sheel; he has a hammock there. Tomorrow, if you are not too tired, I should like to go and see if he is at the sheel."

I bowed assent. "I shall be glad to do whatever you wish," I said, and rose and went up to my room. How empty the world was! How sickening and futile all desire and action! I flung myself down upon the bed, and, like a submerging wave of darkness, the sweet stupor of sleep flowed over me.

CHAPTER V.

I awoke out of a dream next morning. I seemed walking through a forest of giant pines. Far around ran a silvery blue slit of sea. The tree trunks twinkled against it as I walked, and through their tops filtered a slow wind, whispering like a kind of ethereal water flowing along the sky. I was following a voice that called my name from treetop to treetop, Marguerite's voice it seemed, yet it sang my name somehow like a bird. As I walked forward the island seemed to move with me upon the surface of the sea; and I strove in vain to reach the voice. Suddenly, as I yearned toward it with outstretched hand, it flew down as a great golden bee and settled in my palm, and, as I smiled with childish satisfaction, it stung me, and with a cry of consternation I awoke.

Some one was tapping upon the door of my room and calling me softly. For a little time I could comprehend nothing, I had lain all night in such a sodden swoon of sleep my senses seemed benumbed. I had thrown off my coat and shoes only when I lay down, and now I sat up and looked at my person and about me with inquiring wonder.

"Oh," I muttered at last, "I understand now!"

"Mr. Stanwood! Mr. Stanwood!" came the silvery song-like voice, from the door.

"Yes, ma'am," I replied.

"Ah, I have wakened him, Sam!" I heard the voice say in a lower key, followed by light feet hastening away.

I arose and opened the door. The young colored man, grinning broadly, was there. "I couldn' woke yo' up nohow, Marse Francis," he said apologetically, making many little bows. "I jus' thump an' poun' an' call till I was tired. I tole de Mistis I bleebs I bleeged to break de do' down fo' sho; den she comes an' calls a few times, sort o' sof' lak, an' up yo' jumps! 'Deed, Marse, dat woman's won'erful! Breakfus' been waitin' fo' some time fo' you', Marse." He finished with profound respect and deference, bowing low, with his arms hanging straight down by his sides like lifeless plummets.

"I will be down soon, Sam," I said, and closed the door. I stood still a moment. A staggering memory of what I was, of all that had fallen in the last two days, came back to me. A sweat broke out upon my brow with the strong, fresh sense of it. And yet there were the days lying before me; I must go on!

I bathed my face and stepped out upon the gallery. The world seemed vastly wider than the day before. The whole heaven was clear; a deep blue profundity of ether, arching over a world rainwashed and fresh as the imaginations of youth. Oh, Father in Heaven, how good it would be to live were my heart but innocent!

Physically strong again, but sad and gloomy enough, I descended to the dining-hall. The mulatto serving maid, Abbie they called her, brought in some warm food; the young mistress, dressed, as she always seemed to me, in some sort of dainty, cloud-like fabric, poured coffee, and we ate. Sam had a basket of lunch prepared, she said, and if I felt strong enough and wished, we would visit the Dead-lanes. Yes, I would willingly go, I said. Where had I left my luggage, she inquired presently. At Punta Gordo to be sent down by boat to Garcia, I replied. Then we had best send after it on the morrow, she thought. The man could also ascertain if Doctor Stanwood were still at Garcia. I assented with a silent movement of the head. Affable and sweet as was her manner, her last words were as a knife-thrust to me. Should I go on, I dumbly wondered, always receiving torture from her gentle words? Why should I not fly the place forever? And yet, strangely, I felt no strong prompting to pursue this course. Unconsciously I had begun atonement for the deed I had done. She would need help now; it was my duty to serve her. Unconsciously, too, the charm of her beauty and goodness were drawing me; she was binding me with her loveliness. Would it torture and strangle me in the end?

When the meal was ended I got together such things as seemed needful and went down to the boat. Marguerite came presently, followed by Sam with shawls, cushions and a rug. These I arranged in the stern for Marguerite. Sam perched himself in the prow, clutching the sides as if in momentary expectation of being capsized. I took the oars and swept the boat outward upon her journey, one that was to be longer and wilder than we dreamed.

Marguerite drew the tiller ropes forward on either side of her slim waist and held them in her hands, helming the little craft in a sure, effortless way that indicated familiarity with boating. I cannot say how beautiful she seemed, reclining there before me with dapples of sunshine drifting across her as we swept along. A broad hat of straw rested upon her bright head, and she was clad in a fabric of pale pink, with a little cascade of foam-like lace falling about her shoulders and down her bosom to her waist. As the soft light from the glistening water beat up about her, her face looked like a flower.

The young woman sat quietly, leaning back among the cushions and dreamily watching the shadows and dapples chase each other along the shining surface. Bird songs fell down to us from seemingly every tree, and she sat as one soothed by the velvety motion, too contented to care for speech.

At length she looked up to my face, and saw the sweat which exertion and terror wrung from me. "You are a good oarsman," she said with a smile, "but need you hurry so? We are all but to the Dead-lanes now. How rapidly we must have come!"

"I had not noticed the speed," I said. "I am not at all tired," and I cast my eye over my shoulder toward the swamp. A dull, cream-colored object was turning slowly in an eddy beneath some drooping tree boughs near the mouth of the first large bayou.

"Helm the boat to the right!" I gasped. "Quick!"

She obeyed, looking at my face in a perplexed and curious fashion. The boat shot off toward the west shore, away from the swaying object, and as we flew by I threw it a swift, terrified glance. It was a muffled thing, not clear to me there in the shadow, and swaying with the eddy lifelessly. I felt my face blanch, so sharp a shock went to my heart. I turned my head away and in a moment let the oars fall.

"I am afraid I set myself too fast a pace," I muttered. "I feel dizzy, but it is going away now." I took up the oars. "Into which lane shall I pull to find the island where his—where my father—"

"It is the fifth main bayou after the one we just passed," she said. "I have been thinking about it and feel quite sure that I know the way. Please go more easily now, will you not? I think you are not at all well."

I assented with dry, salty lips. My heart shook my breast with every pulse as I drew onward. At length Marguerite drew the little rudder to the left, and, describing a crescent, the boat sped in between the cypress trees. We floated at once in another world—in a subdued but clear, green air, filling a long, winding colonnade, roofed high overhead with flowering green, floored as with amber-colored glass, and pillared on

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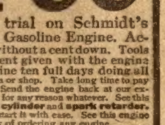

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either hand with moss-covered tree trunks like columns of bronze. It was as if we floated along the loggia of some strange unearthly temple.

Marguerite gave a little cry of joy. "Isn't it delightful! Marvelous!" she cried. Sam clutched the sides of the boat more tightly, if that were possible, and rolled his eyes about in awed, open-mouthed wonder. "Marse Francis, we nebber git out ob here sure if yo' go much fudder! We'll git los' an' nebber git out alive till we're daid!" he gasped.

Marguerite smiled, but was now plainly concentrating all her faculties upon the problem of keeping the way. In the myriad convolutions of water under that dim roof, which, miles long and miles wide, fits down over the great swamp like a tight cover, an error of memory might entail endless labor, if not disaster. Despite the dumb agony which filled me since I saw that terrifying object in the river, I too was intent upon marking the way, so that I might remember it. A purpose, which was both repugnant and fascinating, had formed in my mind. When I had taken Marguerite and the servant to the island, I would leave them there and return to the object in the river, and, if it proved to be the thing I feared, I would hide it so she might not see it when we returned.

At one point the trees stood more closely together, with silver moss hanging down in long filmy veils. I would remember that. At another the vines were larger and more dense; they went upward almost out of sight, coiling and taking long leaps, and suddenly dropped downward to the water and as suddenly leaped skyward again. In girth they were as saplings. I would also remember this. Again, the cypress trees were of immense size, gray-white of trunk, and throwing out a vast, tangled distortion of roots, like a heap of writhing, chocolate-brown snakes. Again, we passed through a dim avenue the sides of which seemed as solid walls of bloom. The place was tight and close and fairly reeking with perfume. I surely would not forget the way.

Marguerite sat silent and with knit brow, clearly putting her will against the distracting quality of the marvels about us. Suddenly she cried out, "There it is! There is the island! See the little sheel as he called it!". She helmed the boat sharply to the right, and soon we were landed upon what was apparently an acre of solid ground. The trees here were smaller and more open, and among them stood a sort of combined shed and arbor. Many of the vines had been cleared off the island and woven into the walls of the odd little structure. In front of it stood a long table, littered with pearl-like shards of insects, strips of snake-skin, the eyes of fish and frogs, and heads and tails and claws of small reptiles. I swept them all off and threw them into the water.

Inside, a luxurious hammock swung across one end of the room; there were a couple of chairs, a table with some books and bits of drawings and notes on paper upon it, and under it a chest. There was no evidence of any one having been there more recently than, probably, a fortnight back. Sam looked relieved now that he was on land, while Marguerite looked faintly anxious, yet fell to canvassing the details of the place with much delight. It was surely a wild and curiously beautiful spot, a secret, uncanny workshop buried in almost infinite solitude. The young wife ran to a cauf, a sort of perforated box, submerged in water near the shore. In it were several squirming citizens of the watery ooze, at sight of whom she cried out laughingly, while Sam, who had followed her, called on Heaven to witness his horror of a region liable to such society.

I stepped into the boat. It was drawing toward noon. "I should like to row a short way down a lane in which I once saw some very fine moss," I said. "I shall not be gone long; I think I shall return by the time Sam is hungry."

"Oh, yes," cried Marguerite, "Sam and I will prepare the lunch. We will bring out the table and dress it under the trees! There is a heap of pine knots back of the sheel; he can light a fire and make coffee. There is a spring near the big live-oak over there, Sam; you can fetch water." She entered into the work with the joyous abandon of a child playing at housekeeping.

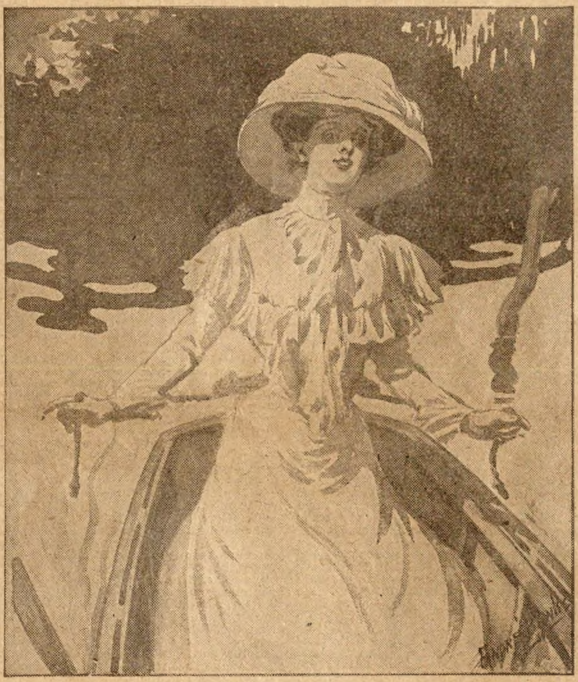
I pulled off rapidly down the bayou by which we had entered. As I sank out of sight she smiled and waved her hand to me. I was in a sad plight mentally, going on such a frightful errand, and stopped by times and bathed my head in the cooling water. No one who has not felt his heart strangled with the oppressive consciousness of having taken human life may ever know what I suffered as I swung the boat through those still weird grottoes, going to seek my dead. The way seemed clear to me, however. My faculties were working with almost cruelly acute intentness. I passed safely the several landmarks I had noted as we came, and, in a half hour or more, emerged from under the gigantic cypress roof and turned the boat's prow toward Magnolia Place.

With straining eyes, and shaking as from an ague, I approached the haunting object in the shadowy eddy. It was still there, wavering and turning helplessly. As I drew nearer, quaking with an anxiety which seemed to freeze me, I could not bring myself at first to look closely at the object in the shadow. But suddenly my eyes sprang to it as if they had entered the field of a supernatural magnet; I cried out at the sight, my blood leaped over me like a shower of fire, and, strong young fellow that I was, I must have swooned, for when the trees, and sky, and light were again clear to me, the boat had drifted from the spot.

CHAPTER VI.

The sensitive soul which has stained itself with crime can have no harsher castigator than its own imagination. Fear and remorse paint such pictures that the noon becomes as midnight. The sunshine is no longer clear, expectation and fancy terrify beyond the actual, and all things take the hue of the dark humor working in the heart.

It was thus with me. When I looked down into the shaded, wavering eddy that noon, fear and anticipation had wrought so appalling an image in my mind, reason seemed on the verge of breaking. When I saw there but a bundle of yellow cane muffled in dead grass, the instant relief and revulsion of feeling swept, for the moment, my consciousness away. Though I had sought the spot with an eagerness that seemed half insane, I cannot say with what gratitude of soul I took up the oars and rowed away.



Marguerite drew the tiller ropes forward.

When I was well into the Dead-lanes again the reaction which surely follows exaltation set in. My mood fell flaccid, my faculties seemed less tense and clear. I looked up with indifference to that ceiling whose workmanship the hand of man could never hope to emulate. Under the floor of amber water, which was as pellucid as so much fine wine, I saw the huge roots coiling everywhere like serpents cast in rusted iron, and cared not. The walls of blossoms here and there impressed me but little. My old mood of discouraged, sickening helplessness had returned upon me.

After a time, however, I suddenly found myself looking about with startled interest. The scene was not familiar. I rowed onward looking for that bend in the colonnade where the moss hung from the branches in such wondrous, silken sheets. I found a long stretch where the roof of tangled vines and branches swam above me in a mist of moss, but it was not the same; many of these swinging films of silver were as cobwebs embroidered in colored flowers. A million blossoms, vividly tinted, starred all that archway of torn and tangled lace. I turned the boat, and rowed back along the dim avenue; evidently in my abstraction I had missed the way. Presently I entered a bayou, transfluent and larger, which seemed the right one. This I followed for some distance, only to find that it was a blind lane, or pocket, ending in a dead wall of tangle. Out of this I found my way with a feeling of dread creeping over me. I turned to the right along the other portion of the transfluent channel, which wound away interminably and merged at last in a dozen forks, which seemingly ended, like subterranean tunnels, in black-green vistas of sunless distance.

Here, where the larger corridor fell into confusion, I stopped and tried to steady myself and take my bearings. But, more than to promise myself to be calm, I could do nothing. Had the sun been visible the situation would have seemed far more simple. To feel that one was lost in that vast, labyrinthine mass of glassy groves, many of which were too small and crooked to follow with oars outspread, and to know that other lives hung upon the result, was inexpressibly disconcerting. No one thing in the dilemma seemed more probable and more dangerous than that nervousness should finally end in frenzy, in a condition in which the brain should take fire from being endlessly baffled and perplexed, and refuse to perform its office.

I turned the boat slowly and beat back along the bayou, and, finding an opening, passed through it into another channel, and so onward, and onward, and onward, until hours had fallen away. By times snakes slid into the brown water from the knotted cypress roots, or lizards ran down the tree trunks with frightened, glistening eyes. Once I came into a tight lane which was a bewildering tunnel through flowers. Millions of air plants dropped fragrance from gaping, gaudy blossoms. So rank and sweet was the odor I could taste it in my mouth and throat; it was a nightmare of perfume, stifling, benumbing, horrible. Only by the strongest exertion of the will was I able to keep consciousness as I hurriedly pulled through it. Ah, if I swooned and died in that well of poisonous sweets, what would be the fate of Sam and Marguerite?

Something of this fled through my mind as I fought for my senses in the midst of that overpowering perfume. When I floated clear of it I was dizzy and gasping. After I recovered possession of myself again, I rowed onward, feeling bewildered and half daft. Doubtless had I chanced on aught that I had ever known before, I should have passed it by as something strange.

There seemed but one course bearing likelihood of my deliverance, and that lay in an effort long enough continued to bring me into open ground, the river, or the Gulf. There seemed scant probability of touching by chance a spot so buried and hidden as the little isle where Marguerite and her servant were. Hence I rowed forward with a hand continually upon my will, striving to be self-contained and hopeful. But, despite all efforts to be patient, my blood would run prickling and giddy at times, as in one who lies long bound and impotent.

Inevitably and at the very beginning all sense of direction and distance vanished from me; I went as one from whom all former knowledge and capacity is cut off, yet who has the power of sight and motion remaining with him.

It was well toward night when, tired, dazed, and all but mad with perplexity, I burst without warning into open ground. Joy rushed over me. Before me rolled a sea of lustrous pale yellow cane, beyond it a fringe of bronze-red bay trees, streaked with the deep green

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GENTLE JABS.

Many a hotheaded man gets cold feet.

A fiery temper doesn't indicate a warm heart.

The fishing line will soon be the popular chord.

Even the freckle faced girl has her good spots.

When a man ceases to doubt he begins to do things.

Dwellers in glass houses should keep out of politics.

Even the blind beggar seems to have an object in view.

Every man is said to have his price, but he rarely gets it.

Some good people manage to be happy even if they are lonely.

It's funny how sympathetic some people are when it is useless.

Many a man acts like a genius when all that ails him is indigestion.

Some men go about seeking temptation in order to test their will power.

Worry is a confession of weakness, but that thought does not help much.

If a man is a fluent talker it's a safe bet he inherited it from his mother.

Some widows shed tears with one eye and do a googoo stunt with the other.

A man is never too old to learn that he knows a lot of things he should forget.

Sometimes the harder a man is to land the less he pleases the woman who lands him.

Occasionally a man makes his mark in the world because his wife makes him toe it.

It's too bad that when a man puts his foot in it he is not in a position to kick himself.

Lots of people pose as peacemakers because of the opportunity it affords them to butt in.

When you hear a man say that he feels better when he works, it's your cue to make a getaway.

After a widow has made up her mind to marry another man she begins to wear colors to match his complexion.

It's a poor brand of religion that makes a man pray for his neighbors one day in the week and try to cheat them the other six days.

(Continued from page five.)

of live-oaks. Overhead arched a sky of lavender, deepening down the west into iridescent hues, like the nacre of a shell. The ardor of vegetation was everywhere magnificent, both in size and the richness of its coloring. In my sudden joy I thought I had never before beheld a scene so beautiful.

I rowed rapidly around the field of cane toward the west, for that way lay the river. As my oars stirred the still lagoons, the lipping ripples ran off and shook the cane, which rattled like a million tiny pines. Great flocks of wild geese, frightened by my coming, surged upward, showing pink-white breasts against the dying sunlight. It was all as music to me.

In less than a half hour I had left the shining sea of cane and plunged into the woods upon the west. After rowing ten minutes longer, with a shout of triumph I swung into the river. The point at which I entered it seemed well down toward the sea, and without a moment's delay—for minutes were as jewels to me then—I turned toward the north. I swept the boat over the water with all my strength, for I must make those glassy paths to the hidden island before night stopped them with its blackness.

When I came to that one by which we had entered the depths of the swamp I was reeking with perspiration, and the filming gray of twilight had begun to settle in the great defile through which the river found its way. After a moment's pause, to gain breath and collect myself, I drove the boat into the bayou. I had but one impulse, and that a burning care to keep the way. When human lives hang upon the faculties of men, in the final test these gifts often grow strangely alert and clear. It was so with me. My own existence, spoiled and worthless as it seemed, grew precious to me, seeing what priceless things hung upon its continuance. I pulled forward with eyes straining upon every turn and object. I found the stretch where the huge vines leaped up like a storm of writhing serpents on either hand, the channel overhung with gray moss veils that reached where the cypress roots coiled in such a hideous tangle, and the passage abutted with magnificent walls of bloom. I had gone forward steadily, I think, for quite a half hour, and darkness was gathering thick in the hushed corridors, when the sound of a human voice, howling, and imploring, and sinking into wailing sobs, reached my ears from out the gloom.

I pulled forward with all speed, for the wailing clamor set my pulses surging with apprehension. In that weird, lonely place the heartrending quality of the noise was indescribably disturbing. In a few minutes I had reached the immediate neighborhood of the sounds, and in a few minutes more had set the nose of the boat into the soft earth of the little island where stood my father's sheel. I leaped ashore and ran to the door of the rustic structure. Near the entrance I all but stepped upon the prostrate form of Marguerite. From the interior came Sam's voice, wild, beseeching, awful.

"What is the matter here?" I cried, a shadowy confusion of dreadful thoughts and inclinations sweeping through my mind. The wailing stopped and Sam came tumbling out the doorway. He looked a part of the ashen gloom.

"Oh, Gord a'mighty, Marse Francis, de mistis done gone an' kilt herse'f!" he cried. "She done gone an' bleed herse'f to death wid a knife! Oh, Gord a'mighty! Oh, Gord a'mighty!" and he fell before me on his face and beat the ground with his hands.

Marguerite's form lay near us, a pale, vapory shape, her hands and face whiter than the lace about them. I stooped down and laid a trembling hand against her cheek. It was cold. A great stillness fell upon me, so strange a hush I seemed to hear the red tide flowing through my veins. She lay upon her side with her arms extended along the ground, and her right hand holding her left wrist in a convulsive clutch. The earth was wet about her hands. I touched the damp spot with my finger tips and held them to my eyes, but could distinguish no color; the moisture looked black in the gloom, but had the unmistakable sweetish smell of blood. I touched it to my tongue; it was faintly saline.

I know not why, but with that my own blood seemed to roar upward through all its channels to my brain. A sudden throe of savagery swept through me. I would know the truth of this or there would be more earth wet with the red liquor of life! In a dizzying rage I leaped upon the black man where he lay praying and beating the ground, and seized him by the neck. "You black fiend!" I shouted, "this is your work! Pray God for your own Satanic soul, and not for her, before I kill you!" I tore him to and fro as if he had been an unresisting rag.

"Oh, Marse Francis! Gord a'mighty, Marse Francis! I neber tech de young Mistis with my little finger eben! Oh, Marse Francis, I nebber look t'wards her ha'dy!" he pleaded.

"You lie, you black wretch!" I cried, with my fingers about his throat.

"Oh, Marse Francis, belieb me! belieb me! I nebber come anigh de young Mistis to lay a finger on'er! She want to dig up a plant, an' she tuck a knife outen de chist f'm under de table an' go out to dig it, an' a lizer' or somet'ing jump out at 'er f'om de roots, an' she strike at it an' cut 'er arm awful! De blood it jus' pour out, an' she run roun' de islan', an' drop down dare an' die! Oh, Gord a'mighty, Marse Francis, please belieb me! please do! It happen 'bout sundown, Marse Francis, an' I been sca't outen my senses fo' fear yo' nebber would come! Oh, Marse Francis, kill me if yo' mus', but I nebber lay a finger on de poo' Mistis! Nebber!"

I flung him from me roughly, poor quivering fellow, and he dropped down and lay with his face in the dust, still praying and protesting his innocence. My anger fell cold, and in its stead came a great pity for them both, and an inward execration upon the folly that tempted me to leave them thus alone. I stooped and began hunting for the girl's pulse; it flickered faintly at the heart, but I could not feel it surely at the wrist.

"Get up, Sam!" I said; "get some pitch knots and light them quick! Here are matches! Place three or four of the torches at the door! bring one into the arbor! If you love your life do it quickly!"

"Gord bress yo', Marse!" he exclaimed, scrambling to his feet and rushing to the rear of the building.

I gathered the inert shape in my arms, and bore it into the sheel with tender care and laid it in the hammock. Sam came running in with a torch which was beginning to flame up brightly. "Your mistress is still alive, Sam!" I said; "maybe I can save her!"

"Oh, bress yo', Marse Francis! Bress yo' an' de good Gord a'mighty!" and he dropped upon his knees and held the torch up by his head, peering with wide, white eyes at the limp figure in the hammock, and praying unconsciously.

After I laid the apparently lifeless body of Marguerite in the hammock, I turned at once to the chest and threw it open. In it were a number of coarse implements of the surgeon's craft, and a small case covered with shagreen leather. This latter I tore open by sheer force, breaking the lock in the operation. Inside I found an abundance of lancets, probes, tubes, syringes, cauteries, forceps, silver thread, and other delicate traumatic tools.

Throwing off my coat, I bared my left arm to the shoulder. I took the torch from the colored man and thrust the unlighted end of it into the vine wall so that the flare would fall more directly upon the girl.

"Bring in two more torches, Sam," I said, "and hold them here!"

"Yes, Marse Francis!" and he sprang out and almost leaped in again with the torches in his hands.

"There—hold them so, Sam!"

"Yes, Marse!"

"Now, Sam, listen! I am going to attempt a dangerous thing!"

"Yes, Marse!"

"I am going to try to pass the blood from my arm into the arm of your mistress."

"Oh, Gord save yo', Marse!"

"I may lose my life in the attempt. I shall cut an artery in my arm here. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Marse, Gord save yo'!"

"You see, I have placed this bandage around my arm above the elbow with this large knot in it? If I should faint or fall from loss of blood, thrust this stick through the bandage and twist it hard, so that the knot will sink deep into the flesh just where I am cutting. That will prevent the blood flowing."

"Yes, Marse Francis!"

"You see, Sam, I have placed a bandage also around the arm of your mistress here?"

"Yes, Marse!"

"Should I fall, twist it as you do mine, and hold it until consciousness returns to me. Now watch and keep steady."

"Marse Francis?"

"What is it, Sam?"

"Couldn' yo' take de blood f'om me, Marse? I'd guv it an' my life willin' fo' her!"

I looked at the black face an instant and something that choked me sprang into my throat. I put out my hand to him. "Forgive me, Sam, for what I said to you out there under the trees. What you wish cannot be, but you are a man and I wronged you."

"Gord bress yo', Marse, yo' didn' hurt me much! Wut yo' said was all fo' her."

"Now, stand ready, Sam!"

Marguerite lay as one dead, breathing so faintly her bosom scarcely stirred. I lifted the slim fingers that clutched the wounded wrist. A strong clot of blood had formed beneath the gripping hand in and about the wound, staunching the hemorrhage. "Push the tail of one of your torches into the wall there, Sam, and hold your thumb hard upon her wrist above the cut here!"

"Yes, Marse!"

I cleaned the incision with a wet sponge, and thrust a small glass tube into the lacerated artery of the girl's arm, then, taking a lance in my right hand, I drew in my breath, set my teeth hard, and carefully laid back a strip of flesh from off the artery of my left arm. Sam's staring eyes were riveted upon my face.

"Marse Francis, yo' is goin' to fall!" he exclaimed. "Gord, how white yo' is!"

(Continued next week.)

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CONQUEST OF THE MOON;

Or, The Airship's Cargo of Diamonds

By GEORGE T. HARGREAVES.

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Begun in No. 13, April 1. Subscriptions can begin with that issue, or back copies can be obtained from news stands, our agents, or by mail from the office of publication.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LOVE PACT.

THE building of the moon flyer went on feverishly. Lester, watching the construction of the new and revolutionary craft, fairly drove his workmen forward.

Unsatisfied with the progress made—though it was remarkable—he put on a night shift to hasten the work. The great steel frame grew like some birdlike monster. The sturdy steel wings were set in place. The great air-proof cabin was riveted in its place. Its furnishings were as complete as those of a millionaire's seagoing yacht. There was a cozy lounging room, a compact operating room, a dainty dining room, a snug kitchen and a broad storeroom. On each side of these was a tier of staterooms, enough to accommodate a dozen of passengers and crew.

A deck below held the power room where was to be generated from the precious radium the tremendous driving force which Babcock had discovered, the supply room wherein by the manufacture and fusing of oxygen and nitrogen a plentiful supply of living air was to be obtained, and another store room where the large amount of water they would be compelled to carry was to be placed.

Above the lounging room was erected the small cupola wherein Professor Jekyll's telescope and other astronomical instruments were to be located.

Sides, top and bottom of this remarkable structure were of carefully constructed aluminum, as tense and firm as steel but much lighter in weight. Conveniently placed were small windows of heavy glass, fitted to be air-tight.

Last of all the great twin propellers of bronze were fitted into the stern of the craft, and the wonderful automatic balancing apparatus attached to its sides.

Every precaution was taken to render the proposed journey across two hundred and forty thousand miles of atmosphereless space as safe as human means could render it.

Babcock supervised the work all day and far into the night. Then snatching a niggardly sleep he was back at his task when day broke. He worked with an added interest to make every part, every appliance of the airship perfect. Yet his object was less the fame that the new craft would bring to him, less the world-old reputation that the trip, if successful, would win for him, less the untold riches that would be his if Professor Jekyll's dreams came true. It was more the safeguarding of the fortune which Virginia Larned was investing in the enterprise. He wanted, at least, to see her great sacrifice rewarded. He wanted every last jewel that she had so willingly pawned to finance the expedition safely returned to her.

Occasionally he stole time from his task to make a hurried trip to the Nookery. She grew more tender and more piquant as the time approached for the start of the world-stirring sky flight.

"Lester, dear," she insisted during one of the aviator's visits, "you must get more rest. You're simply working yourself to death. Look at those tired eyes and those great black circles beneath them."

She reached up and ran her soft hands caressingly across the face.

"Nonsense," he answered laughingly as he gathered her in his arms, "I feel just like a bundle of steel."

"And how is the new ship doing today?" she inquired softly, mollified by his caress.

"Famously," he said with enthusiasm. "We got word by cable this morning that our radium had been shipped from Austria. It should be here in two weeks."

"And then we will be ready to sail?"

"Yes, after a trial trip or two. But we'll have to have a little christening ceremony first."

"And what are going to name this wonderful bird of yours?"

"Don't you know?" he asked smilingly.

She shook her pretty head bewitchingly.

"But can't you guess?"

She lifted her face to his and shook her head again.

"Oh, Fair Luna or something like that, I suppose," she finally hazarded.

"Not much," he responded with mock dignity. "A far better name than that. The prettiest name in the world—to me."

She buried her head in his bosom, elevated her eyes roguishly and murmured: "What, you dreadful old teaser?"

"Virginia—after your dear self," he answered as he drew her close and showered her brow with kisses.

"Oh, you darling," she breathed and pressed her lips fondly to his.

"That settled," Babcock resumed, "there's one other matter that's worrying me more than the building of the ship."

"Pray, what?"

"My dear girl, you must give up your intention to make that trip with us."

"What?" She drew away from him instantly.

"Yes, I cannot let you make the risk. You know something of the dangers, the chances against us, but not all. I cannot let you take them."

"You think I would not be brave enough?" she said with flashing eye. "You think that after we had gone part way, perhaps, my courage would ooze and I would beg to be taken back to earth?"

"No, no," the aviator answered. He tried to grasp her hand but she evaded him. "I have no doubt of your bravery. You would inspire us all, I am sure. But you must not take the risk. You have a glorious future that it would be a crime for me to allow you to chance losing."

"A future? Without you?" Virginia asked, her breath coming fast. "Lester, you're mistaken. Without you, life would be a blank. You're thinking of all my money, my place in society. Faugh, I'm sick of it all. Don't you see I'm glad to surrender it all for you—just for you?" And in an excess of emotion she cuddled into the protection of his arms again.

"But, my dear child, think of what the world would say when it became known that we had taken you with us," argued Lester. "They would assail us as fiends for permitting you to go. They would attribute all kinds of selfish, cowardly, crazy motives to us."

"But couldn't you bear a little just for me?" she asked archly.

"And then," Babcock continued without noticing the interruption, "what would society say? Think of it, my dear girl. A young woman of your position running off on a trip of weeks, maybe months, with a party of men and without a chaperon. Great scot, how tongues would rattle about you. Dearest, it just can't be."

"I don't care what they say," the girl flamed, stamping her dainty foot. "If you knew them as well as I do, you'd know they're a spiteful lot of gossips anyway with nothing to do except busy their unkind tongues with the names of their betters. You've got to give me stronger reasons than these, my master," and she looked up at him with eyes glorious with unselfish love.

"They are the best I have, dear," said Babcock, feeling his resolution weaken under her rapt gaze. "I am the captain of the 'Virginia,' however, and can say who shall go with her and who shall not. I beg you not to force me to use my prerogative in saying you cannot go."

The girl's eyes studied the rug at her feet for quite a moment.

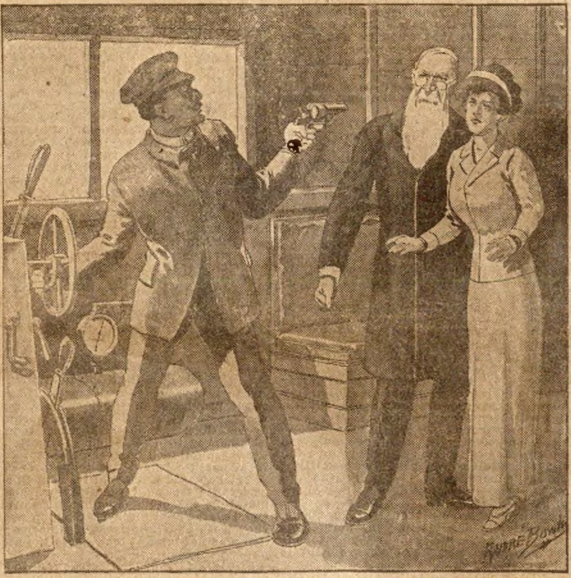
"No, dear," she finally said, "I will not drive you to say that. But there is still a way for me to go that you cannot object to."

"I don't believe I quite understand you," said Lester, stroking the silken hair that lay so close to his heart.

She looked up at him lovingly but shyly, then let her eyes drop. She snuggled a mite closer to him. Then she murmured, so timidly that he barely heard:

"As your wife."

He tingled in every nerve. The blood surged through him till his brain seemed to fairly swirl. His joy was so exquisite that he fairly gasped for breath. It was quite a moment before he could command his voice. Then he crushed her anew to his breast, lifted her face that he might smother it in kisses and panted:



"Silence, both, or I will fire!"

"When, dearest, when will you make me the happiest man that ever drew breath?"

"In the hour that we sail, dear heart," she responded brokenly and with love-hungry eyes beaming up at him. "We'll be married in the 'Virginia' and start immediately on our honeymoon to the moon. How romantic."

"Agreed," he said rapturously and again he covered her lips, her cheeks, her eyes, her scintillating hair with kisses.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOME SECRETS DISCLOSED.

That same night Lester and Professor Jekyll, seated within sight of the night shift of workmen busy upon the new airship, discussed at length the completion of their plans for their lunar voyage.

"Professor," said the aviator, "I am completely satisfied with every part of our plans but one. I am as sure of the new craft's ability to make the voyage safely and to return as well as I am that I breath. I have gone over every part of her till there isn't a single joint that won't do its part satisfactorily. But I am not so sure that we humans can stand the strain so well. Five miles up we will begin to pant for breath. Twenty-five miles up we will be out of the earth's atmosphere and we will die without a fresh air supply. I have left that with you. You promised that you would be able to take care of that condition and I trusted you. But with our departure now only the matter of a few days, I feel I should know more of your expedient to keep us supplied with fresh air."

THIS WASHER MUST PAY FOR ITSELF.

A MAN tried to sell me a horse once. He said it was a fine horse and had nothing the matter with it. I wanted a fine horse. But, I didn't know anything about horses much. And I didn't know the man very well, either.

So I told him I wanted to try the horse for a month. He said "All right, but pay me first, and I'll give you back your money if the horse isn't all right."

Well, I didn't like that. I was afraid the horse wasn't "all right" and that I might have to whistle for my money if I once parted with it. So I didn't buy the horse although I wanted it badly. Now this set me thinking.

You see I make Washing Machines—the "1900 Gravity" Washer.

And I said to myself, lots of people may think about my Washing Machine as I thought about the horse, and about the man who owned it.

But I'd never know, because they wouldn't write and tell me. You see I sell my Washing Machines by mail. I have sold over half a million that way.

So, thought I, it is only fair enough to let people try my Washing Machines for a month, before they pay for them, just as I wanted to try the horse.

Now, I know what our "1900 Gravity" Washer will do. I know it will wash the clothes, without wearing or tearing them, in less than half the time they can be washed by any other machine.

I know it will wash a tub full of very dirty clothes in Six minutes. I know no other machine ever invented can do that, without wearing out the clothes.

Our "1900 Gravity" Washer does the work so easy that a child can run it almost as well as a strong woman, and it don't wear the clothes, fray the edges nor break buttons the way all other machines do.

It just drives soapy water clear through the fibers of the clothes like the force pump might.

So, said I to myself, I will do with my "1900 Gravity" Washer what I wanted the man to do with the horse. Only I won't wait for people to ask. I'll offer first, and I'll make good the offer every time.

Let me send you a "1900 Gravity" washer on a month's free trial. I'll pay the freight out of my own pocket, and if you don't want the machine after you've used it a month, I'll take it back and pay the freight too. Surely that is fair enough, isn't it?

Doesn't it prove that the "1900 Gravity" Washer must be all that I say it is?

And you can pay me out of what it saves for you. It will save its whole cost in a few months, in wear and tear on the clothes alone. And then it will save 50 cents to 75 cents a week over that in washwoman's wages. If you keep the machine after the month's trial, I'll let you pay for it out of what it saves you. If it saves you 60 cents a week, send me 50 cents a week till paid for. I'll take that cheerfully and I'll wait for my money until the machine itself earns the balance.

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Let me send you my Proof Treatment absolutely Free; you can safely reduce your fat a pound a day.

Note what my treatment has done for others:

Mrs. Eva M. Reynolds, Box 114, Lehigh, Webster Co., Iowa, writes: "When I commenced your treatment I weighed 285 pounds, I now weigh 165 pounds, and never felt better in my life."

Mrs. W. D. Smith, Box 34, Abbott, Me., writes: "I have lost 51 POUNDS by your treatment. I used to have heart trouble and shortness of breath: now I am well and can walk and work with ease."

Miss Dicie Wilson, Box 78, Franklin, Tenn., writes: "I have lost 69 POUNDS by your treatment and I feel like a new person."

I could fill every page of this journal with testimonials from grateful patients.

It is dangerous, unsightly, uncomfortable and embarassing to be too fat. Excess fat weakens the heart. The liver, lungs, stomach and kidneys become diseased, the breathing becomes difficult and the end comes in **HEART FAILURE** and sudden death. You can save yourself from these **DANGERS.**

I want to prove to you that my treatment will positively reduce you to normal and no matter where **FREE** the excess fat is located, stomach, bust, hips, cheeks, neck, it will quickly and safely be reduced without exercising or dieting. **Your figure will be beautified; flabbiness and wrinkles disappear.** Rheumatism, asthma, shortness of breath, kidney and heart troubles leave as the fat goes away. I will send you without a cent of expense on your part, my PROOF TREATMENT FREE. It reduces fat at the rate of a pound a day and does it safely and permanently.

Don't miss this offer. My PROOF TREATMENT is FREE. It will make you feel better at once. I will also send you **Free my new book of advice,** together with testimonials from many well known people. **Write to-day.**

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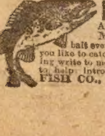

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"My boy," a rare smile passed over the scientist's seamed face, "if it were only that which is to trouble us, I would lose the last trace of apprehension. That was the first problem I undertook in studying out our expedition. Rest secure in my arrangements."

"But what are they?" persisted Lester.

"Without going into all the minute details," the professor went on slowly, "I can tell you that I have perfected a method of fusing oxygen and nitrogen, the two elements in our air. It then becomes easy for us to manufacture atmosphere for our own consumption by the application of well-established scientific principles."

"Let me in on it a bit, will you," quizzed Babcock.

The professor cleared his throat and went on raptly but slowly:

"Well, we can produce oxygen from chlorate of potash. One ounce of that salt will yield two gallons of oxygen in the new apparatus I have perfected. Mixed with a quarter of its weight in black oxide of copper, I find that the evolution of the oxygen is greatly facilitated. Next we come to the problem of producing the nitrogen which makes up nearly eighty per cent of our air. By heating together strong solutions of ammonium chloride and of potassium nitrate, I have, been able to demonstrate that a steady current of nitrogen can be obtained very easily.

"It thus becomes merely a problem of fusing these two gases in the proper, life-sustaining proportions. I have successfully effected that result, too. All the necessary machinery and apparatus have been manufactured under my personal direction and have been thoroughly tested for efficiency. They work like a charm. With your permission I will install them in the new ship at once."

"But, suppose that when we get to the moon we discover that contrary to your present belief, there is no life-giving air up there," suggested Lester. "In that case, it would be impossible for us to leave the airship and make any explorations, wouldn't it?"

"No," smiled the professor, "I have been forehanded in that matter, too. If my theory is not borne out; if there is absolutely no atmosphere on the moon, we can have recourse to my expedient I have ordered a set of air tight suits with helmet headpieces, similar to those worn by submarine divers. In addition I will have a liberal supply of stout hose, capable of being attached to these headpieces. From our supply house on the airship, we would thus be able to get away as far as would be necessary to make complete observations and examinations."

Babcock smiled at the unpretentious figure.

"You certainly are a wonder," he exclaimed in a burst of enthusiasm. "However did you come to master all these problems?"

"My boy," responded the astronomer a bit shakily, "the moon has been my obsession ever since I was old enough to look through a telescope. Every year has strengthened my purpose to settle by a personal visit all those enigmas that have puzzled the sky gazer since the days of Ptolemy. I feel now"—a light almost supernatural blazed in the old man's eyes—"that my dreams are about to be justified."

"But, sir," he went on after a pause. "I'm interested a bit in your method of power. I have never asked you to explain because you have always held it such a close secret."

"It's so simple as to be almost laughable," responded Lester, lowering his voice a bit. "A young physican-friend who had been experimenting with radium first drew my attention to its possibilities. I became absorbed in the study. After many vain efforts I managed to invent a process that would work. Developed as it has been for our new airship, it works something like this: The precious radium comes to us in six-inch thick tubes of the highest tempered steel. By the aid of small dynamos I am able to convert the tremendous power in the radium into electricity and to make use of the current through a delicate transformer My motors complete the operation."

"Too deep for me," said Professor Jekyll. "I shall have to see the system at work before I can credit it."

"In two weeks you shall have the chance," answered Babcock confidently.

Thus the conference which was an almost nightly occurrence now broke up. Had the two men remained in the workshop another five minutes they would have been able to see the skulking figure of a man thread the field that fronted the Babcock hangar, pause many times as if waiting for a signal and then emit one long, shrill whistle.

Then the skulker edged into the shadow of a neighboring hangar and waited. In five minutes he was joined by a man in the garb of a machinist.

"Late eet ees you are again," sputtered the first comer. "Thees ees ze second time."

"Jeroc, I couldn't help it," sulked the second man. "It's mighty hard to sneak away. They're watching us all like hawks."

"Weel, what have you learned of ze plans?" demanded the recreant Frenchman, for it was none other.

"Mighty little," admitted Bill Tabor, the machinist. "They're keeping 'em damned close."

"And thees ees what you tell me for ze hundred dollaire I geev you to help me," gesticulated Jeroc with a flush and a reel that plainly told he had been dallying with brandy and absinthe again.

"All I can find out," answered Tabor gruffly, "is that they're expecting this strange power in about two weeks and that they'll be able to start away within a few days after that."

"And what ees thees great power?"

"You ought to know better'n me. Babcock used it on the trip to 'Frisco. You was with 'im. I wasn't"

"So he steel keep ze secret, eh?"

Tabor nodded glumly.

"When weel they start for ze moon?"

"In two weeks I heard 'em say tonight."

"Ah, and you are one of ze crew?"

"Why not? We get five thousand dollars before we start and twenty-five thousand when we get back—if we do," said Tabor with a grimace. "It's worth the risk. Us fellers has got to die somehow."

"You can make ze more money," insinuated the cunning Frenchman.

"How's that?" inquired the workman looking up sharply.

"You help me and I weel geev you feefty thousand dollaire," muttered Jeroc, close to the other's ear.

The machinist laughed raucously. "Where'd you get a pile like that?"

"Where I got ze hundred dollaire I have geev you already," flashed back the Frenchman. "See," and he drew out a roll of bills and shook them before his companion's eyes, "eet ees all mine. You be with me and you weel be reech."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I weel go in thees new airsheep," whispered Jeroc. "I don't know how yet but I weel. Maybe I need ze help. Eef I do I say 'Bill, do thees.' And eef Bill he do eet what I say I weel geev heem what I say—feefty thousand."

Tabor, daredevil too, revolved the offer in his mind quickly. He wouldn't be loser by accepting it. If Jeroc's scheme, whatever it was, developed satisfactorily and promised success, it would be easy to shift his support to the Frenchman. If the plot went awry, he'd just stick to Babcock. In either event he could not lose anything—he was sure of a nice bundle of coin.

"All right, Frenchy, I'm with you," he said. "But, mind you, there ain't to be no killin' in this."

A sinister grin overspread the mecanician's crafty face.

"Killing? Oh, that would be ze shame," but he gave no promise that he would refrain from bloodshed in the execution of the desperate plan he was now busy formulating in his brandy-soddened brain.

CHAPTER XXII.

JEROC TURNS SKY PIRATE.

The "Virginia" was prepared for flight promptly on time. Lester, under the spur of bonus offers to his workmen, drove them at their highest tension. The nearer to completion the work got, the more anxious he became to get away from earth without public notoriety.

Yet he could not avoid it. Though his assistants were all carefully warned to maintain the strictest silence regarding the revolutionary air craft upon which they were at work, news of its construction was not long in leaking to the newspapers.

Stories, full of conjecture as to the purpose of the huge airship, were printed. One newspaper had it that its object was to lay waste the cities of Japan. Another insisted that it was to try to discover the South Pole. Still another declared it was to be the plaything of a noted millionaire who intended to attempt to fly around the earth.

Lester and Virginia smiled at these guesses. But they, too, soon came more prominently into the limelight. Babcock was hounded for interviews and beset by photographers. Virginia had to close the door of "The Nookery" against society reporters who sought to learn whether there was anything in the gossip that she was to be married soon to the aviator.

To keep out the curious public, Lester redoubled the guard about the hangar of the new craft. But still they clamored in ever increasing crowds for a peek at the wonderful ship.

But when the shipment of radium arrived and with the care befitting its enormous value was fitted into its nook, Babcock tried out the "Virginia" on a clear night in August.

With him he took the crew he had selected for the journey to Luna. Virginia and Professor Jekyll went along as guests.

"If she works all right," said the aviator as he took his station in the operating room with his friends near by, "we'll take a speed flight across country."

Too large to be taken out of the hangar by hand, front and roof of the structure were removed.

Sounding a tinkling bell that communicated signals to his powerman, Babcock had the motors turned on. The great propellers whirred and the entire

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craft quivered like a frightened bird for an instant. Then as Lester curved the steering planes for an ascent, the huge craft rose into the air on as even a keel as that of any ship that ever cut its way through a waveless sea.

In the glare of the electric lights with which the entire craft was illuminated, the three in the operating room glanced apprehensively at one another.

So much depended upon this initial test! All Professor Jekyll's long cherished dreams, all Virginia Larned's jewels, all Lester Babcock's hopes were involved in the evolutions of the new flyer in those first few minutes.

Their apprehensions were short-lived. Within two minutes the "Virginia" had proven her right to the highest honors in aviation. She soared away without a quiver, the lights from her many windows making her look from earth like some giant Transatlantic liner that had deserted its native element for the air.

As Babcock, up two miles, turned on full speed and thrust the nose of his craft toward New York City, he said with a smile:

"We'll have Broadway guessing tonight all right."

And they certainly did. Literally millions of eyes turned upward to gaze in astonishment and awe at the impressive spectacle. Airships in number had flown over the metropolis in the night but never any that compared with the size, the brilliancy and the speed of this one that dashed far above skyscrapers at a speed that put the fastest railroad trains to shame.

Nor was the scene spread beneath the "Virginia" less entrancing to the little party aboard than was the sight from below.

Wherever the eye turned, myriads of flickering lights shone upward through the night. The metropolis lay like some tired giant, his great form bearing in every part a sparkling yellow eye. Suburbs for miles also cast up their pale rays. It was like an earth-wide fairyland.

"Wonderful, wonderful," murmured Virginia as she edged to the aviator's side and laid her hand gently on his arm. "And to think that you have done all this. You're wonderful."

Modest to the core, Lester looked his thanks for the tribute. But he kept both hands firmly upon the steering wheel and both eyes focused ahead through the wide front window of the room.

In a moment he glanced at the clock that hung among the other apparatus against the wall.

"It is just nine o'clock," he said, "and we are just over the Hudson. The distance from here to Washington is close to 225 miles. By the compass and the lights below I think I can make out the path. We'll try the trip anyway. I'm anxious to test our speed powers."

Pointing the airship's nose south, Lester signaled his powerman to turn loose his motors to the limit. The craft felt the added impetus with a series of leaps. Then it settled into a steady flight which the automatic balancing apparatus kept as even as though steel rails supported them.

Yet there was no sensation to make them realize the tremendous speed at which they were flying. They scarcely realized it until the aviator glancing below, said quietly:

"That's Philadelphia down there. Philadelphia is ninety miles from New York. And we've made the distance in a trifle less than twenty-five minutes. The 'Virginia' is going to live up to a 200-miles-an-hour reputation all right."

Virginia clapped her hands. Professor Jekyll could not repress a smile.

Pointing now across a stretch of country toward the national capital, Lester was no longer able to gauge his distance from the earth accurately enough for safety at the tremendous speed at which they were being propelled. So he directed downward the searchlight which he had fitted. Instantly a broad stream of light showed him his way.

At ten o'clock they were soaring above the dome of the national capitol. They had made the 225 miles in exactly an hour. Babcock curved homeward with a sigh of satisfaction.

At eleven o'clock they were sweeping above the lights of New York again. There had not been a jar, a single false motion in any part of the new ship. Carefully Lester had called every member of his crew to him for a report. Every one of them announced that not a flaw could be seen.

"We're prepared then," Lester declared to Virginia and the professor, "just as soon as we get all our supplies aboard. We can easily make more than two hundred miles an hour. Our power is illimitable. Our apparatus is proved."

In three days the "Virginia" was watered and provisioned. But one thing remained to make them completely ready for the long flight. That was the secret of Lester and Virginia—their marriage ceremony.

Obedient to the girl's whim, it had been settled that the wedding should take place in the little lounging room of the airship within fifteen minutes of the time of their start. That was scheduled at eight o'clock under a clear moon in its first quarter.

But hours earlier a throng that knew no bounds, intuitively scenting, under the weird guessing of the newspapers, some spectacular happening, began to swarm toward the aviation field.

So rapidly did the crowd grow that it quickly threatened to become uncontrollable. Babcock, in fear lest the mob should imperil his machine, called Virginia on the phone.

"It will be unwise, unsafe, dear," he said, "for me to keep the 'Virginia' here longer. This crowd is liable to do something savage in its wild curiosity. We'll fly over to the 'Nookery,' alight on the lawn and then I'll take a car and get the parson. We can be married there instead of here."

"Excellent," responded the girl. "It'll be more romantic too, right here on our own lawn. It's a wonder we didn't think of it before."

In fifteen minutes the "Virginia" soared away, much to the disgust of the throng of spectators, and headed toward the north.

Jeroc, watching the maneuver like a hawk, instantly jumped into an automobile and dashed after the airship. He drew up at the "Nookery" just as Babcock speeded away in a motor car to secure the preacher who was to perform the marriage ceremony.

The Frenchman smiled grimly. Ten minutes before he seemed to see the wreck of his daring plot. Now his active mind reconstructed it.

In an ambush of hedge he watched the proceedings. He saw the narrow door of the aircraft open and Professor Jekyll step out upon the lawn. The astronomer crossed to the house and in a few moments emerged with Miss Larned, laughing gaily, hanging upon his arm. They hastened across the grass and entered the ship.

"Now," muttered the Frenchman and he broke cover and dashed after them. He stepped upon the little landing stage and looked within. His friend and tool Tabor was the only person in sight.

Jeroc put his finger to his lips in token of silence and slipped within gently closing and locking the door behind him. From his duplicate plans which he had carefully studied he knew the entire interior.

"You," he whispered to Tabor," do what I say. Go to ze engine and take charge. One bell, slow speed; two bells, fast; three bells, stop. You understand?"

Tabor nodded nervously.

"Here ees ze gun"—and Jeroc handed over a revolver—"use eet eef eet ees necessary. We are een control now." He showed another gun. "And we'll get away before Babcock ees back. The pirates of ze air, see," and the Frenchman leered wildly.

With his hand clasping a second revolver, he darted into the operating room. Virginia and the professor, watching from a window for Lester's return, did not notice the intruder.

Jeroc seized the steering wheel, glanced out into the falling dusk and then as he heard the rumble of an approaching automobile rang the starting bell.

Virginia sighted her lover returning with the clergyman and heard the starting bell at the same instant. In alarm she turned to find Jeroc at the wheel.

"What are you doing there?" she cried frantically. "Wait, wait. Lester is coming."

For answer Jeroc leveled his revolver at the astounded pair and shouted:

"Silence, both or I weel fire."

Tabor, new to the engine, was slow in turning on the power. But the "Virginia," with a momentary quiver, left the earth and headed skyward.

That slight delay, however, in starting the motor enabled Babcock to drive his auto madly across the lawn. He leaped out and with a despairing plunge managed to clutch the landing stage.

As the airship swung at full speed into the heavens, he dangled helplessly in the air. Almost unable to breathe at the frightful rate at which the "Virginia" was already traveling, he realized that in a moment or two at most he must let go his fragile grip and fall like a plummet to a horrible death below.

This capital story will be continued in the next issue of the Ledger. During the coming year many great stories will appear in these columns. If you are not already a subscriber for this paper, it will repay you if you send in a year's subscription. It only costs you $1.00, and you will never regret it. Let us hear from you at once.

DAME NATURE HINTS

When the Food Is Not Suited.

When Nature gives her signal that something is wrong it is generally with the food; the old Dame is always faithful and one should act at once.

To put off the change is to risk that which may be irreparable. An Arizona man says:

"For years I could not safely eat any breakfast. I tried all kinds of breakfast foods, but they were all soft, starchy messes, which gave me distressing headaches. I drank strong coffee, too, which appeared to benefit me at the time, but added to the headaches afterwards. Toast and coffee were no better, for I found the toast very constipating.

"A friend persuaded me to quit coffee and the starchy breakfast foods, and use Postum and Grape-Nuts instead. I shall never regret taking his advice.

"The change they have worked in me is wonderful. I now have no more of the distressing sensations in my stomach after eating, and I never have any headaches. I have gained 12 pounds in weight and feel better in every way. Grape-Nuts make a delicious as well as a nutritious dish, and I find that Postum is easily digested and never produces dyspepsia symptoms."

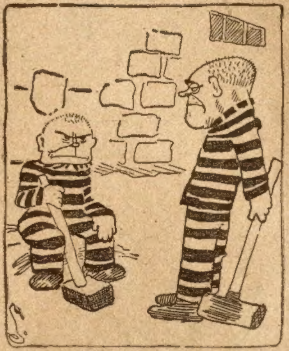
Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

Get the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs. "There's a Reason."

Ever read the above letter. A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

* * *

Enough Said.



No. 13—Wot kind of a lawyer did you have?

No. 23—Well, de jury was out five minutes.

* * *

Felt the Sentiment.

"Gentlemen, I am a man of the world," said the man who had nearly finished a bad cigar, "and I confess that I haven't been inside a church since childhood; but the sentiment of Easter has peculiarly appealed to me for the past ten years."

Of course, we all wanted to know why, and after lighting another cigar worse than the first, he continued:

"Fifteen years ago I lived in a town in Connecticut. It became necessary for me to go to Brazil on business. In fact, I wished to transplant 10,000 rubber trees from that country to the Nutmeg State. You know how it is when a man starts off on a long journey like that—the faltering words, the farewells, the tears."

He was assured that we all had been there, and he expressed his satisfaction and went on:

"On landing in Brazil I had the misfortune to run against the then dictator. It was in a narrow street and we were both in a hurry. He was a man who feared assassination, and he at once had me arrested as a would-be assassin. For over four years I was a prisoner in a filthy dungeon. Then a change of government took place, and I was given my freedom and told to get out of the country at once. I got."

"And during all these long years you must have thought of your wife many thousand times," suggested the short man, who had been trying to get up a game of poker.

"Yes, thousand and thousands of times. After many trials I finally reached New York. It was on Saturday. I was ragged and penniless, but I beat my way to my home town on a freight train. Yes, next morning I was there, but as I walked the street no one recognized me. In wending my way to my home I passed a church just as a bridal party entered. Curiosity impelled me to follow."

"And you found that the to-be-bride was your wife, who thought you dead and herself a widow?" said the short man.

"Just so."

"And of course you made yourself known, the ceremony was stopped and your wife went home on your arm? Same old story."

"But it didn't end exactly that way," smiled the other. "No, I didn't make myself known. No, the ceremony was not interrupted. It went right on, and my wife was married to an old Hunker."

"But—but——"

"It was cheaper than getting a divorce, you see. In fact, it didn't cost me a cent. All I had to do was to keep quiet and marry a rich widow later on. Equal to the card system in business. Try it once and you will take no other."

* * *

A Realistic Church Scene.

Author—Well, how did you like my play?

Critic—Oh, it was very nice.

Author—Didn't you think the church scene realistic?

Critic—Intensely so. Why, a great many of us actually went to sleep while it was on!

Are You Fat?

You know you can not stay fat, don't you? That is, you can not be fat and be in style. The day when a fat woman was tolerated is passed. Nowadays all women must be in proportion or be ridiculous. This does not mean you should become skinny, however. You should not get below the hard flesh line. All you ought to lose is the bulky fat. That done you will find yourself to be a well formed and therefore handsome woman.

Now, how can this be done? By exercising and dieting? Yes, and no. These two means will bring some results, but not easily nor soon. One is very hard work; the other is torture. Besides, neither can be depended on to cause a uniform reduction. They may take off a fleshy shoulder, for example, and leave the double chin untouched. What you need, you see, is something pleasant to take that without injury to your health will take the fat off uniformly and quickly, say at the rate of a pound a day or so, until it is all gone where you want it to go.

For this purpose nothing is less expensive, safer or simpler than Marmola Prescription Tablets. Inexpensive because one large case, costing 75 cents only, will produce results; safe because they cause no wrinkles or stomach trouble, but rather improve the health and complexion, if anything; and simple, because they do all the work without asking thought or effort on the part of the taker. In short, they are the ANSWER if you are fat and wish to be thinner. If your druggist is of the better kind he will have them. If not, write the licensees, The Marmola Company, 1238 Farmer Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

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After using the Free Bottle if you are not satisfied that you have received the Best Whiskey Value obtainable at the price, keep the Free Bottle for your trouble, pack remainder of shipment, return at our expense and we will at once cheerfully refund every cent paid us.

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Write us now. A postal card will do. Or tell your friends about it.

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AGENTS Don't accept an agency until you read our new book, "Piling Dollars," it's FREE. W. F. DARLING, DERRY, N. H.

DON'T ACCEPT an agency until you get my samples and particulars. MONEY MAKERS Address SAYMAN, 604 Sayman Building, St. Louis, Mo

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FREE SAMPLE goes with first letter. Something new Every firm wants it. Orders $1.00 to $100.00. Nice, pleasant business. Write today. Metallic Sign Co., 416 N. Clark St., Chicago

MAKE $10 A DAY Selling mottoes and pictures. Send 25c for big sample offer consisting of one motto and ten different pictures. Clinton Mfg. Co., Dept. 17, Haymarket Bldg., Chicago

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AGENTS My Sanitary Coffee Maker produces pure, sweet coffee, needs no settler and never wears out. Saves coffee, money and health. Every wife buys at sight; new invention; exclusive territory. Send 15c. for 50c. size, postpaid. DR. LYONS, 429 Day St., Pekin, Ill.

Live Agents Wanted

Hustlers to handle our attractive combination packages of soap and toilet articles with valuable premiums. One Michigan agent made $65 in 47 hrs., another $21 in 8 hrs., another $22.50 in 10 hrs. Write today. DAVIS SOAP WORKS, 307 Davis Bldg., 1431 Carroll Ave., CHICAGO

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Agent's Directory List, Indiana, Pa.

In His Worst Condition.

"You can't see my husband; he is not at home."

"But, madam, I want to see him the worst way."

"Well, if that's the way you want to see him you'd better sit right there on the steps until he comes from the club."

How to Spot 'Em.

"I shall not wed until I can marry a hero."

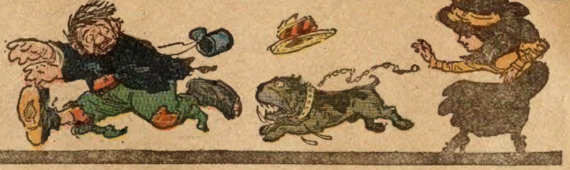
"Well, you show the first man who proposes to you a schedule of the cost of living, and if he still asks you to take him for your meal ticket he is a hero."

Light on the Subject.

"I guess you see things in a different light, young man, since you were married?"

"I ought to. Among our wedding presents were fifteen brass lamps."

TICKLISH

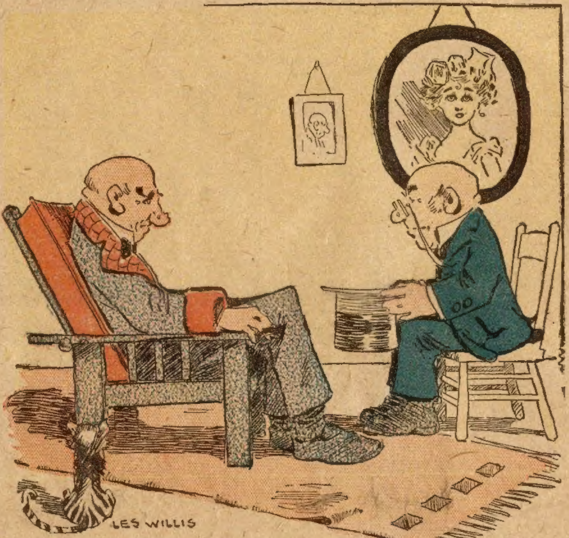


A Talker From Talkerville.

"Mrs. Gabber fell downstairs, and bit her tongue in two."

"I feel sorry for her husband. She was a terror when she had only one tongue!"

EXPLAINED.



Scroggs—I have a gnawing feeling in my stomach.
Dr. Boggs—Maybe you have swallowed your false teeth.

A Good Reason.

Mrs. Takem—Huh! Pretty condition for you to come down in! Been drinking, have you?

Mr. Takem—All (hic) a mistake, m' dear. I'm all ri' (hic), dash whash I am.

Mrs. Takem—Huh! Haven't been drinking, eh? Then why do you talk as if your mouth was full of mush?

Mr. Takem—'Cause a shoft ansher turnesh away wrath, m' dear.

His Request.

A millionaire lay dying. He summoned his lawyer.

"Mr. Tape," said he feebly, "draw my will and make it brief. I want my money so left that not one penny of it shall ever leave this country. How shall I manage that?"

"Easily enough," answered the lawyer. "Leave it all to foreign missions."

One or the Other.

"What's that noise?" asked the visitor in the apartment house.

"Probably some one in the dentist's apartments on the floor below getting a tooth out."

"But this seemed to come from the floor above."

"Ah! then it's probably the Popleys' baby getting a tooth in."

Too Much Lung.

Young Wife—My dear, the first time I saw you, you were with a party of students giving the college yell.

Husband—Yes, I remember.

"And I noticed what a remarkable voice you had."

"Yes, you spoke of it. Why?"

"Nothing, only I wish the baby hadn't inherited it."

Slow Death.

A suburban druggist had been advertising his patent insect powder far and wide. One day a man rushed into his shop and said excitedly:

"Give me another half pound of your powder, quick, please."

"Oh!" remarked the druggist, as he proceeded to fill the order, "I'm glad you like the powder. Good, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied the customer. "I have one cockroach very ill; if I give him another half pound he'll die."

Our Present Divorce Laws.

Friend—How is your wife?

Citizen—Wife? I have no wife.

Friend—You certainly told me you were a married man.

Citizen—That was across the river, in another State. I am an old bachelor in this State.

A Sign for the Surgeon.

"Of course," said the surgeon who had operated for appendicitis, "there will be a scar."

"That's all right," replied the patient. "Leave any kind of a mark you like that will prevent some strange doctor from coming along and operating again."

A Perplexing Query.

Salina, Kansas, has a new business firm with the euphonious name of Ollinger & Hollinger. Now, how would a genuine Englishman ever be able to make himself understood as to which of the two he was talking about?

Rockefeller in Poverty.

Dremer—Did you ever think what you'd do if you had Rockefeller's income?

Mugley—Yes, and I've often wondered what he'd do if he had mine.

LADIES, PRESERVE YOUR YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE.

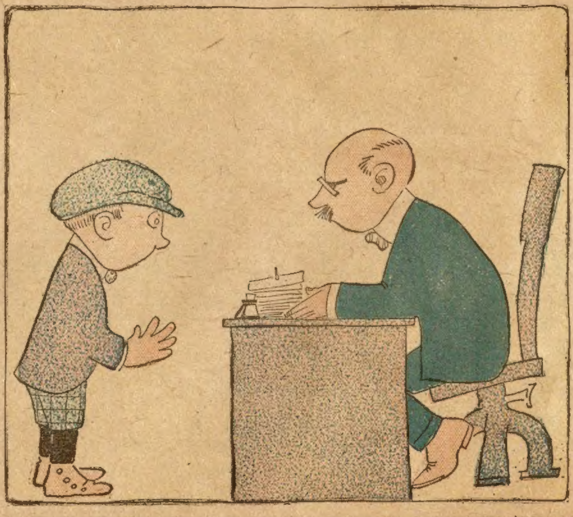
Madame Mignette's Beauty Cream and Skin Food removes every defect, spot, freckle, pimple, blemish or wrinkle, leaving the skin soft, clear and smooth. It is perfectly harmless and will not injure the most delicate skin. It preserves and brings back the youthful glow to the face and ruddiness to the cheeks, preserving it in this condition until extreme old age. This preparation has been used for years and hundreds are now using it and are more than delighted with the results. Send us ten (10) cents for formula which you can have filled at any drug store at a very small cost. Do not delay, but write at once. Box 491, Blairsville, Pa.

Hot Stuff.

Sinnious—Borus, that last book of yours is pretty hot stuff.

Borus (struggling author)—It ought to be; every critic in the land has roasted it.

QUALIFIED.



"I advertised for a good strong boy. Do you think you can fill the bill?"
"Well, I just got through whipping all de other kids that came to apply for the job."

AGENTS WANTED

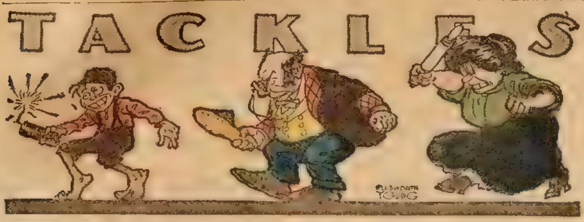
Marvel Bait makes FISH BITE and The Famous Marvel Automatic Hook catches every nibbler. ☞ Write for AGENT'S OFFER. Send six cents, stamps, to cover cost, postage and mailing sample. Dept. C, JAPANESE NOVELTY CO., CLINTON, Iowa

TOBACCO FACTORY WANTS SALESMEN. Good Pay, Steady Work and Promotion. Experience unnecessary as we give Complete Instructions. Piedmont Tobacco Co., Bx.G14, Danville, Va.

AGENTS PORTRAITS 35c, FRAMES 15c. Sheet Pictures 1c, Stereoscopes 25c, Viewslct. Thirty Days' Credit. Samples and Catalog Free. CONSOLIDATED PORTRAIT, Dept. 4154, 1027 W. Adams St., CHICAGO

AGENTS—Here is an opportunity to make a fortune. Sell the Cinch Tire Repair Kit. Write today for particulars. The Enterprise Co., Box 95, Treynor, Iowa

TACKLES



A Spring Idyl.

Mrs. Smallot—Why don't you burn up that pile of trash in the yard?

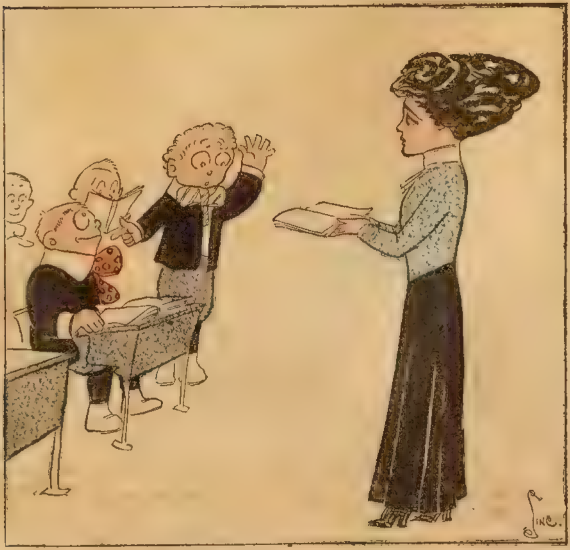
Mr. Smallot—Wind's th' wrong way. The smoke would all blow in our own windows.

A "Jiffy" Defined.

Tommy (who has been told to go to bed)—Pa, how long is a "jiffy?"

Father—It's just about the length of time you've got to go to bed without a licking.

SWEAR WORDS.



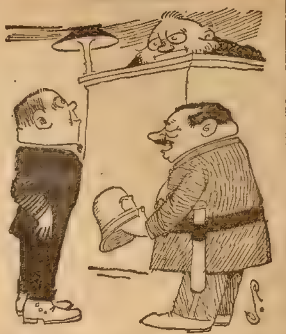
Teacher—Well, Tommy, what is it?

Tommy—Please, mum, Willie Jones used a swear word at me.

Teacher—Did he? What was it he said?

Tommy—Please, I don't like to say it, but if you 'll repeat all the swear words you know, I'll tell you when you come to it!

Unavoidable.



Judge—Why did you strike the plaintiff?

Defendant—How could I hit him; judge, unless I did?

Our Elastic Language.

First Customer—I wish to select a vase.

Floorwalker—Yes, madam. James, show the lady to the crockery department.

Second Customer—I wish to select a vawz.

Floorwalker—Yes, madam. George, show the lady to the bric-a-brac department.

Unimportant.

"Yes, I helped lynch those three fellows down in our State the other day. Lots of us leading citizens were on hand."

"What had the three victims done?"

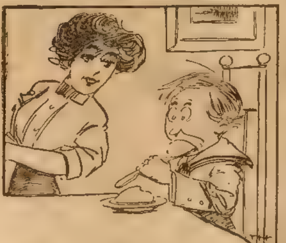
"Eh! Why, I forgot to inquire."

Its Resemblance.

"Did the man whose auto was in collision last night give it a cursory examination?"

"It sounded that way, sir."

Juvenile Enjoyment.



"Ma, am I goin' to get 'nother plate of i' cream 'sides this one?"

"Why, my son?"

"'Cause, ma, I want to know whether to gobble thisun up er drag it out."

Understood His Business.

Druggist—I am getting up a new patent medicine, and I want some signs painted.

Scenery Decorator—How many words?

"Not many. Just say 'Take Doctor Squills' Sirup for that Tired Feeling.'"

"All right. I'll put it on every steep hill I can find."

A Victim of Housecleaning.

Missionary—Was it liquor that brought you to this?

Imprisoned Burglar—No, sir; it was housecleanin'—spring housecleanin', sir.

Missionary—Eh? Housecleaning?

Burglar—Yes, sir. The woman had been housecleanin', and th' stair carpet was up, an' th' folks heard me.

FREE ASTHMA CURE.

D. J. Lane, a chemist at 115 Lane Building, St. Marys' Kansas, manufactures a remedy for Asthma in which he has so much confidence that he sends a $1 bottle by express to anyone who will write for it. His offer is that he is to be paid for it if it cures, and the one taking the treatment is to be the judge.

Woman Defined.

"What is a woman?" asked the speaker.

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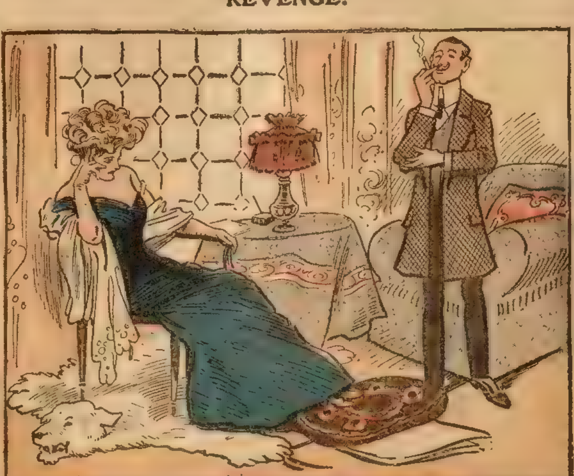

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Or THE MOUNTAIN EXILES

By WILLIAM H. MANNING

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CHAPTER X.

NEW GUESTS FROM THE OUTER WORLD.

"I KNOW!" and Leland's jaws shut with a snap.

"You will dare it?"

"Man, I should curse myself eternally if I did not. Danger? Well, so be it! These people shall not die here like neglected animals."

With this he rose from the chair he had been occupying and, bending forward over the table, deeply added:

"Chief Leedron, I want a few hours more to study the case, but if there are no better symptoms I go to Gilbraith before dark!"

Leedron grasped his hand.

"God bless you!" he said, again, and neither man remembered that Leland was forbidden by Hillman decree ever to leave the Haven.

"Now!" pursued the doctor, sharply, "for another try to discover herbs on our own premises. I will myself go out, and do you renew your search. Nooks and recesses are many. Come, friend, let us search!"

Leedron had forgotten his position as chief of the refugees. Carried away by the crisp fervor of the doctor he yielded passively, and both went as planned, separating as soon as the village was passed.

Two hours Dale hunted the valleys and hills, but his endeavors came to nothing. Roots and herbs were to be had, but not the sorts he wanted. He was still hunting when he heard three or four distant rifle shots. He lifted his head and looked but saw nothing.

"Sounded as if near the boundary line of the Haven!" he murmured. "It means nothing;" and he bent forward to look at a tiny plant. Then another shot echoed from the same point.

Worry seized upon the doctor. Rifles were rarely fired by the Hillmen, and this was certainly a series of shots from a point whither they did not go to work or to hunt. Dale had been ready to abandon his search before; now, he was even more reconciled to do it. Facing toward the point whence the shots had sounded, he struck into a trot and gave heed to nothing else.

Five minutes later he was passing the foot of the cliffs that fronted the pasture valley on the west—erratic, confused, deeply-creviced uplifts of bleak rock—when, without further warning, two persons emerged from one of the clefts.

He saw a man who bore a boy in his arms, and both were stained with blood. More than that, these two persons, fully within the refuge, were not of the Hillmen band.

Leland checked his speed and looked hard, and then the strange man, after staggering blindly, dropped his burden and fell heavily beside it. Like the boy, he lay as if dead.

A moment later Giles Leedron emerged from the same cleft through which the man and boy had come. The chief was pale and noticeably agitated, but he bore himself with the steadfastness of a brave nature. He looked first at the fallen couple, and then at Dr. Dale.

"Chief!" cried the young men, "who are these persons?"

"I don't know. I found them beset by our ancient enemies, and wounded almost to death, so I brought them here."

"You don't know them, and yet you brought them into the Haven?"

"Humanity demanded it!"

Consternation had hold of Leland Dale. Inaccessibility was the only safeguard of the Hillmen, and now two strangers were introduced to the refuge. Who were they? Were they reliable? A traitor in the Haven could ruin everything and bring its people to death. These newcomers might be worthy of confidence and sympathy, or they might be there to betray and wreck. The doctor felt his heart sink. That moment told how closely his life had been welded with those of the refugees

"How did you find them?"

"I went outside to search for plants, and there was firing at a distance. Soon this man appeared, bearing the lad in his arms. Both were wounded, as you see. The man said they were deserters from the valley people, hunted like wild beasts. The helplessness of the boy appealed to me—I could not but take them in!"

"I hope——"

Checking his speech, Dale bent over the man, who was the nearer to him, and touched him with professional fingers. The man stirred under the touch and half-started up. His eyes opened, and a wild glare was within them.

"Run, Peter, run!" he gasped, "or they will kill you! Go, and I will keep them at bay! Go!"

"Be calm!" spoke Leedron persuasively. "There is no danger here."

The stranger gazed hard at the chief and his wild glare subsided. Then something like an expression of great joy came to his face.

"Oh!" he cried, "I remember, I remember! You took us away; you brought us here! Praise heaven, we are safe, safe!"

He fell upon his knees, clasped his hands and, looking at the sky poured forth a brief, earnest prayer. Leedron and Dale watched, the former with anxiety and uncertainty, and the doctor with fear, doubt and sternness. But the stranger turned to the boy.

"Oh! Peter, Peter!" he added huskily, "why do you lie so still? Are you dead?—tell me, how do you fare?"

He was on his knees by the lad, and blood dripped from his head to the face of the motionless companion of his fortunes. Had there been no cause for apprehension, the sight would have been most pathetic. Leland, worried and skeptical, but perfectly cool and collected, stirred himself. Whoever these persons were they were within the Haven, and there was but one thing to do.

A rider shoots from the pass.

Kneeling by the boy he began a quick, scientific examination.

"His wound is of the left arm," explained the elder stranger. "He has lost much blood and fainted. See!—the life-fluid has soaked through the sleeve.

Producing a knife, Dale slit the cloth and the arm was exposed. He saw a long gash; a wound that had certainly bled freely, but the flow was not then alarming.

"Will he live?—oh! will he live?" demanded the man.

Leland gave him a glance. He was tall, lank, thin of face and unevenly bearded, and he did not appeal to the doctor. The latter made a brief, noncommittal reply, and then noted the respiration and pulse of the patient. This done, he addressed Leedron.

"Is water near?"

It was near, and it was quickly brought by the chief and freely used to restore the apparently suspended faculties. Dale watched over the demonstrations of life, while the boy's friend squatted in sudden silence and Leedron stood erect, troubled and gloomy.

If the elder stranger was unpleasant in Leland's eyes the lad was not. Some fourteen years old, he was a strong but not over-large youth, and he had a smooth, regular face, though one more mature than was common to his age. On the whole the face attracted, but a puzzle went with the boy—his prolonged unconsciousness perplexed the doctor.

And, whereas his respiration was surely slow and feeble, the beat of his pulse was strikingly steady and firm.

A fresh wave of suspicion rolled over the man of medicine—that pulse-beat was not a natural accompaniment of utter and continued insensibility.

But, suddenly, the lad's eyes opened and he looked about him with understanding.

"Peter, Peter!" cried the man, "do you still live?"

The younger stranger gazed at his elder. Then he smiled faintly.

"Is it you, Thomas?" he responded huskily. "I thought I was dead. What has happened? Oh! I remember—the flight, the pursuit, the attack upon us, the dreadful threats of our foes, the wound, the faintness and the awful dread. Where——" he looked about him as if in bewilderment—"where are we?"

"Safe, safe!" Thomas exclaimed jubilantly. "We are in the mountain refuge, among friends. The noble Hillmen have taken us in, my boy."

"Oh! may heaven bless them—and may we bless them and heaven!" and the lad struggled, got to his knees and betook himself to prayer as Thomas had so lately done.

Leland looked, meditated, studied, doubted, wavered. Where did truth lie? Peter, as now seen, was a comely and winning youth. Too rugged to be of the saintly order in appearance, he nevertheless seemed frank, earnest and worthy of confidence. He gave thanks to man and heaven with grace and outward simplicity in which no element of duplicity could be distinguished.

When he finished his prayer Leedron turned to Thomas.

"Who are you?" he asked slowly but kindly.

"My name is Thomas Hooper. The lad is Peter Brown. We were of the valley people, but we—we could not endure life there—their sins, their hypocrisies, their intolerance, their tyranny—and we sought to flee to this refuge. We were pursued, attacked, wounded—yes, they gave me this in seeking to kill me!"

He touched his bruised and bleeding head, and even Dale was impressed by his appearance. Either a great sham was afoot or Thomas Hooper had been mercilessly beaten and wounded; his head was ghastly.

Leland and Leedron exchanged glances. They had often looked before, and with various emotions, but, just now, their meeting glances took up the great problem of the hour—what was to be done with the newcomers? It was a singular proof of the friendly standing Leland had acquired in the Haven that the chief consulted him even with a glance, but he did not intend to share any responsibility. Not by so much as the motion of a muscle did he indicate what he deemed best

Leedron was his old strong self and he took up the problem in practical manner. He asked many questions, all of which were answered with seeming candor, but the replies only enlarged upon what Hooper had already said. In brief, the chief had before him two persons who claimed to be fugitives from the people of the valley, exactly as he had once been himself.

Leland, listening and waiting, knew that the questions and the hesitation could lead to but one end. The moment that the strangers were admitted to the sanctuary of the Hillmen it became an assured fact that they must be taken to the village and there entertained.

While the men talked the doctor saw

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to the boy's wound and bound it up crudely. It had occurred to him that, for a time, he had rather it should not be known he was a physician. With this fact concealed, something more might be added to the heart-beats that had so impressed him.

Leedron announced his decision at last and all started for the village. The newcomers walked weakly, but Hooper insisted on aiding the boy, and thus they went on to their destination.

Again there was consternation there, and the scenes that had followed Dale's arrival, were largely repeated. Alarm walked masterful in the Haven, and pale faces and weak nerves were common.

Eldad Kendall was selected to aid Leland, and then Hooper and Peter were conducted to one of the houses and put to bed, after which the care of their wounds began. Leland habitually carried a pocket-case with a supply of surgical instruments, but he kept all these out of sight except a needle for sewing, using a common knife for other purposes; and he prudently made his work a trifle clumsy, though thorough.

Hooper's hurts were all of the head, and they were many. One was a knife wound, while others were bruises, and the whole, combined, made a show that sickened Kendall; yet Leland saw plainly that none would cause serious trouble unless there was a fracture beyond them.

The cut in Peter's arm was his only injury of importance, though there was one bruise on his scalp. He had lost some blood, but was far less hurt than his companion.

When these wounds had been properly cared for the doctor regarded his patients more closely. Peter lost nothing by this scrutiny. He still seemed to be a frank, straightforward, honest lad, but it was clear that he was mentally over-mature for his age, and Dale suspected that, if necessary, Peter could bring remarkable shrewdness—and possibly adroitness colored by duplicity—into the affairs of life.

Hooper was neither handsome nor attractive, and, in a way, he appeared to lack intelligence, but in his thin face and small eyes was a sharpness and subtlety that suggested the weasel, and, perhaps, went quite as far in the affairs of life as higher intellectuality. The eyes had another peculiarity—one was a decided gray, and the other a decided blue in color.

Yet Hooper was, in a way, frank of manner, and he looked people in the face unwaveringly and was exceedingly mild.

The medical critic was noplused, but, side by side with a wish to be just he unavoidably felt doubt and suspicion of these newcomers.

CHAPTER XI.

ON HIS MISSION.

Presently Doctor Dale left Hooper and Peter in charge of two of the Hillmen and went outside, bound for the impromptu hospital where Irad Harney and his wife lay ill. Going, he passed yet another house where he saw Giles Leedron and his principal followers in earnest consultation. Their sober, anxious, nervous faces told a plain story, and Leland knew they were debating as to their proper course toward Hooper and the boy. There was the same intentness and somberness he had seen when he was a stranger there, and yet, in this case, he knew what the decision would be.

Resuming his way he gave full attention to Harney and his wife. When he went forth, Sylvia, still installed as nurse, followed him into the fresh air.

"Doctor," she said, "what about these newcomers to the Haven?"

"Queen Sylvia," he returned, "I don't know."

"But you must have an opinion? Is it favorable to them?"

"Pardon me, but it is the duty of others to judge the man and the boy."

"You do not think well of them!" she exclaimed, almost feverishly.

"I dislike to admit that, and, more than anything else, I dislike to prejudice any one against them. I am but lately come to the Haven. It is not my province to act as judge. There might have been a mistake made as to myself—far be it from me to make a mistake as to them."

"I have not seen them, but I will. Now, doctor, our two patients here—what is their condition?"

"Frankly, it is bad!"

"They have—what?"

"Fever of some sort. Such things cannot be differentiated in an hour or a day. It may prove to be typhus or typhoid, or some one of those fevers not yet fully understood. You know I have established quarantine here. Now, let me say that the nurses I have agreed shall be with the Harneys must rest properly and not debilitate themselves by over-doing."

"What is to be done for the fever? Nay, do not hesitate; my father has told me of your assertion that you are going to Gilbraith for medicine, if necessary. I[illegible] necessary?"

"Candidly, it is necessary, and I shall g[illegible] I am allowed out. You know that I [illegible] forbidden to leave the Haven."

"[illegible] let me go, instead. You are not r[illegible] one of us, and it is more my duty t[illegible] yours—"

"[illegible]ardon me, no! I have studied the peculiar situation in the valley, and nobody can go but myself. A doctor is needed for the venture."

Sylvia stood silent and Leland looked at her attentively. He was learning her better as the days passed. She had been the first to go to the help of the Harneys, and was still intent upon her work, though well aware that the opinion was rife in the village that they were afflicted with a trouble that might be both contagious and dangerous. In this crisis her courage was unshaken and her skill surprised the doctor. Naturally a capable nurse, she shrank from neither work nor danger.

A few words more were spoken, and then Leland went to the house where he had left the elder men of the Haven in consultation. He found them just emerging. Leedron seemed pleased to see him.

"Doctor," he said, "we have talked it over. We see but two things open to us—to put the newcomers outside this refuge, or to receive them in kindness. We do not know who they are, nor whether they are trustworthy, but to expel them would be as grave an injustice, perhaps, as that which sent us here. The only alternative is to let them remain."

"I see," returned Leland indirectly.

"Will you give us," asked Jabez Roebuck, "your opinion of the two persons, man and boy?"

"What would it avail you?" Leland answered. "In the way of mere opinions, yours is as good as mine. Only time will show clearly whether they are to be trusted."

There was brief silence; then Leedron suddenly asked.

"Have you again seen the Harneys?"

"Yes."

"I hope they are better?"

"They are constantly growing worse!"

Dismay followed the declaration, and the Hillmen seemed to grow old abruptly and in concert.

"What is the trouble?" asked Malachi Shane.

"Fever of some sort, though just what I cannot yet tell. I will frankly say, however, that I believe it to be contagious, and it may prove fatal."

"What is to be done?"

"Either die here like poisoned rats or go to Gilbraith for medicine!"

Leland Dale, standing straight and firm, impressive in his physical and mental strength and direct as the flying bullet, shot out the ultimatum tersely.

"But," protested Shane, "we are all known to Dr. Appleby, and probably to doctors farther away. They are our deadly enemies."

"I am not known to them. I have before said that I am the man to go, and I say so again—"

"If they know you are from here, or if they suspect you are friendly to us, they will kill you instantly."

"I will risk it. Now, men, see here!" and Dale grew more emphatic. "Ten days ago, when you received me here, it was decreed that I should never go outside this Haven. I want all of you to go into session again, and think this over well and talk it over, but two things let me say right here—I would sooner lose my life than betray you, and—here is the great point of all—I fear that, unless I get the needed medicine, you, and your women and children, all here I say, will die of the fever. It may be a pestilence. Now, let me leave you to talk it over. If you refuse to trust me outside I will still fight the disease here, and act the nurse while I live, but I had rather secure medicines and save everybody. Decide for yourselves. Do I stay or go? Men, my heart is with you—heaven help you in your deliberations. But if I go it must be within a few hours. Now, decide."

Wheeling, he walked rapidly away. For ten minutes he lingered beyond the group of houses, and then went to where Hooper and young Peter lay. He found the boy up and sitting by the man's bed. Hooper was in what seemed to be troubled sleep, and he moaned and tossed and muttered of pursuers and assailants—a jumbled nothing.

Leland, after attentively bending over him, turned suddenly to Peter. He found the lad regarding him keenly and, he thought, analytically. Peter settled farther back in his chair and sighed deeply.

"Sir," he said, and his voice was low and gentle, "how do you find my good friend?"

Dale resolved to try an experiment.

"My child," he returned gently, "life is uncertain. Let us hope for the best, yet, it may be that you will be left alone. Death is merciless. It is well that you prepare!"

The boy's eyes filled with tears

"Oh! sir," he murmured, "it will break my heart if anything happens to him. He is so good, so noble, and he was so kind to me. He brought me out of the midst of my foes, and was as kind as a father."

"You can see how bad his hurts are"

"Poor Thomas, poor Thom[illegible]! It would be terrible. But, sir, Providence watches over the good, and I feel that he will recover. If he does not—"

Peter paused. Tears rolled down his cheeks, but he looked Leland unwaveringly in the eyes. He had said his say, and presently the doctor left the house. He had made nothing by talking, but his opinion that the lad was a mature lad for his years was confirmed. Only the future could tell whether innocence or guilt inhabited his heart.

Once outside Leland saw Leedron and his companions by the door of the building where he had left them. The chief separated himself from the others and walked toward the doctor, and the latter went to meet him. They were soon face to face. Leedron was pale but unexpectedly free from nervousness.

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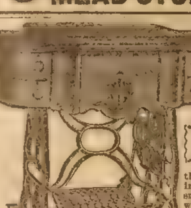

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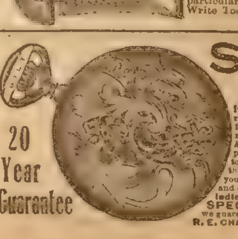

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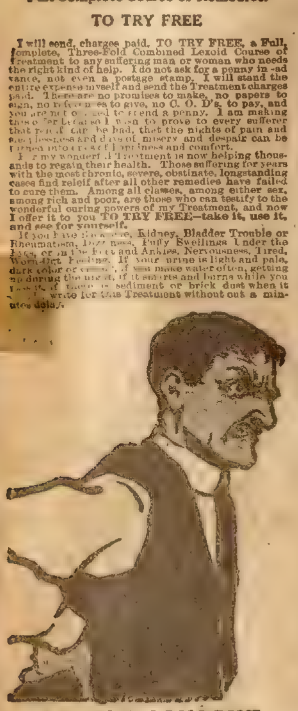

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"Doctor," he said, "we have talked it over. It seems very strange that you should take the burden of our peril upon yourself, and stranger yet that we should thus trust one until lately an entire alien to us, but so it is. We are agreed; there is no dissenting voice. We put ourselves, our women and children in your hands."

"And with safety. I may die, but I will not betray."

"There is a vital point for you to consider. I repeat that if they of the valley suspect you are from here they will kill you. Think of that! Don't trust to the hope that they will not be alert; they are always that, and the matter of Hooper and the boy will make them a thousand-fold more so. They will swarm the ridges, gulches and defiles. Your one hope is of slipping through their parties. Friend, it is rash to the point of madness!"

"It shall be risked, though I realize that this warning is not that of a timid man. I will go, and I'll bring back that medicine or die on the way!" declared Leland, quiet of manner but doggedly firm.

Leedron seized his hand, and a clasp was exchanged such as was new in their experience.

"As to medicine," added the doctor, "have you liquors here?"

He waited for the answer with double interest. It was asserted by some that "the Bishop" secured his strong drink from the Hillmen.

"We have not so much as a spoonful," Leedron returned regretfully.

"Good! Oh! I mean that I will try to get it. One thing more. I must be taken outside blindfolded!"

"Blindfolded?"

"Yes, My good faith must be thus sworn to."

"But your good faith is not doubted. Blindfolded? Oh! no, no!"

"I say yes. When I am left alone, outside, I will not have it in my power to betray your secrets. Do you agree? Wait!—do not make further remonstrance. It is possible that I may be butchered by the valley foes, and that they may be able to enter here in the same hour. You would think I had betrayed you, and, dead, I could not clear myself. Wait!—hear me out! Blindfold me before we leave the village, take me outside the Haven, turn me twice around so I'll lose all points of compass, and then whip off the blindfold and get out of sight. In that way, and that way only, will I go for medicine!"

Leland finished, and Leedron fell to remonstrances, but in vain. The doctor was resolute, and, in the end, he had his way. Believing that it would be to his interest to enter Gilbraith just after nightfall, he planned accordingly, but there was still some time on his hand.

Knowing that Asa Dickson was one of the brightest and most alert of the Hillmen, Leland had suggested that he be deputed to watch over the new arrivals that night. The answer being favorable, he went to the young man.

"Asa," he said, "we don't want the health of Hooper and young Peter imperilled by rashness on their part. Will you kindly see that they do not leave their room, tonight, no matter what the excuse?"

Dickson regarded the doctor keenly and then nodded.

"I understand," he said.

"Their health, you know; their health!"

"Their health!" repeated Asa, smiling grimly. "Depend upon it, they don't go out this night!"

"Good! That may mean a lot for us."

An hour later Leland left the village, accompanied by Leedron and Simon Rudd. He had started for Gilbraith or death.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE RIDES, ONE WATCHES.

The sun was nearing the western horizon. Its rays fell on the crest of the great precipice that overlooked the eastern valley, and on a single person who sat within a few feet of the rock's edge. The person was Sylvia. Sitting there, she could see the valley, the town of Gilbraith and the farther towns where lived the relentless foes of her kindred and associates.

She looked constantly and eagerly. New interest attached to the valley. The final day-labor of the farmers had taken on some importance, and other things far more acute of interest. Any man there might yet have part in the immediate future, and the future loomed large.

A mile beyond the valley the semi-level ended and rocks and ridges began, and this rough ground gradually rose until, off to the north, it swelled into a mountain as large as Mount Taber.

Somewhere up there, but not distinguishable from her position, the Pathowick trail cut the elevation, forming the road by which wagon-trains and general travel found their way east and west. From the so-called trail a lesser pass led at right angles, reaching south until it met the valley.

It was the plan of Doctor Dale to claim that he came from the Pathowick trail, and, as a result, he must reach Gilbraith with the appearance of having traveled the cross-pass. His daring plan included the temporary confiscation of a horse from an outlying farmer, in order that he might come dashing from the mountains.

And Queen Sylvia watched to see him appear.

The sun disappeared, twilight fell and darkness followed. The sky was cloudless, moonless, but starlit. She could no longer see objects below with distinctness, but each moving person was a black dot that traversed the field on their several errands. Among these Leland would, of course, not be recognizable in the usual manner, but she was there to see a horseman come from the pass that led to the Pathowick trail and then to follow his fortunes further.

Another hour elapsed. Men still came and went, but no rider. She grew anxious. Had the doctor failed in the first stage of his hazardous venture?—had he fallen victim before reaching the valley?

Stay!—a rider shoots from the pass and, facing Gilbraith, moves at an easy gallop across the intervening land.

"Leland!"

Queen Sylvia breathed the word softly, agitatedly. She leaned forward as if to pierce the darkness and be with him in the flesh, as she was in the spirit. Nor did she doubt that her surmise was correct. A horseman had appeared as he was to appear; she felt sure it was the bold man who would save the Hillmen from destruction.

A thrill of admiration, a thrill of other sensations, an intensity of sympathy, but, with all, a sickening fear of what the future might have for him. The fifty-odd houses of Gilbraith showed blackly, relieved by the bands of light that gleamed from windows and doors, and toward that place, the dwelling-place of four hundred, Leland Dale went alone, his life dependent on his easy bearing, quick wit and courage.

She quivered and uttered a sob, but her eyes were dry—dry and bright with feverish emotion.

"Would that I were with him, to help, to share his danger, to live the danger through there, or to—"

She ceased. Her will to be there did not waver, but she knew that death might walk in Gilbraith that night.

The dark horse and its dark rider swept on and entered the town. She did not know where Doctor Appleby lived, but she was able to trace the rider to the door of a house, where she saw him dismount and enter.

Then the weary wait began.

Her imagination pictured the scene within that village house. In fancy she saw Leland and old Doctor Appleby, and heard the call for medicine. Would Appleby believe that a wagon-train was stranded on the Pathowick trail, its people ill of fever and in need of the medicine that was requested?—or would he suspect this stranger who came galloping to his presence? Suspect?—the word sent tremors to her heart and she suffered acutely.

"He is there!" she whispered, "and I can do nothing!"

Five minutes passed, ten, fifteen. Then somebody came out of the distant house, leaped to the back of the horse and went flashing back toward the north hills. Her sinking heart lifted, thrilled and grew glad. It was, it must be Leland!

Across the end of the valley sped the four-footed ally of the night. Now he was a quarter way to cover, and now half-way. But, suddenly, a light flashed off to the far east and the report of a rifle rose to the crest of the precipice.

Sylvia's heart gave a great leap and she seemed to choke. The dreaded exposure had come, she thought.

Another shot, and others yet. And the separate flashes sprang into the darkness and died away like the many-tongued voice of doom. Horse and rider kept on their way, but the flashes were always abreast of them, moving north as they moved.

"They have detected him!" Sylvia sobbed, and now tears came in abundance. "It could not be otherwise. They are always alert, and they have found him out. How—how can he escape?"

She hated the darkness that revealed so little and shut out so much from her view. How went it with Leland Dale? Did he waver? Did he already feel the sting of hostile bullets? Did he keep up only because his will was as deathless as his courage? Was he riding to the limit of his endurance only to fall in the end and be lost to the fever-sufferers of Mount Taber and—to her?

For a confession went out that night on the crest of the precipice, and the spirits of the air knew why she watched the way to the mountains and the traveler of the way!

Suddenly the rider disappeared. In her agitation she had not realized how near he was getting to the rocks and ridges until, one moment visible, he and his horse took another bound and were gone from the level course.

It was something, much! But he was still two miles from the entrance to the Haven, and foes might throng the way. What next?

She waited and watched. The firing had died away; no longer the flashes bit at the air, and now silence, almost painful in its profundity, prevailed everywhere within her hearing. And she could no longer follow Leland with her gaze, nor know if he went in strength or lay stricken by the way.

Another hour, and another yet! She had grown nervous. Standing, she look-

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ed first to the north hills and then at the midway ridge of the Haven. For a half-grown boy had agreed that, when Leland returned, he would fire a pile of brush near the temple on Blue Ridge, and thus notify her. Nobody knew of this plan but themselves, but Sylvia, wishing to keep the remoter hills under observation, trusted to the boy for the first tidings that the doctor was back in the refuge.

She waited, longing for the blaze, but the night waned and the ridge lay black and gloomy under the stars of the sky. Suspense grew almost unendurable. Why the delay? The tangled ground bordering the Pathowick trail was hard to traverse, but Leland should be back. What delayed him? Was he lost, or wounded, or captured, or— She shivered and tried not to think. For she knew he might be dead.

Suddenly her relaxed muscles grew tense. On Blue Ridge a tiny flame showed like the eye of hope. It rose, it increased in size and power, it mounted in air as if proud of the purpose back of it. It burned on, but Sylvia was not on the crest of the precipice to see it. With the free leaps of the antelope, and with heart lighter than her beating feet, she was racing back to the Haven village.

She arrived there just as Leland entered the square, accompanied by Giles Leedron and Simon Rudd. Their voices rose jubilantly.

"No trouble!" Dale was saying. "I successfully appropriated a horse from the remotest farm-yard, rode to Gilbraith, made necessary inquiries, told Doctor Appleby of the imaginary wagon-train on the Pathowick trail, got the medicines I wanted, rode back, returned the horse to its proper place, and then footed it the rest of the way. But, confound it! I got woefully lost in the defiles and gulches, and that's why I was so long gone."

Sylvia had run excitedly to them while this explanation was being made.

"But the firing, the rifle shots?" she cried.

"Probably a bear-hunt along the outer edge of the valley," Leland responded. "It was well beyond me."

It did not, at that moment, occur to him as strange that she knew of the firing, and he briskly added:

"Now for the Harneys! Not a minute must be lost!"

Little more than a minute had passed before the fever victims had their first medicine, and the atmosphere of the village changed materially. Downcast hearts had become hopeful, once gloomy faces were bright, and despondent voices rang with high hopes. The danger had been dared and the prize was won.

But Leland, though now like a soldier supplied with coveted arms, was well aware that a battle was to be fought in in the Haven. The type of fever was full of portentous features, and there might not only be a hard fight to save the Harneys, but perhaps an epidemic might ensue.

During the next three days there was no unexpected change in their condition. The disease held its grasp tenaciously and both patients were delirious most of the time, but Dale was not disheartened. All was in the usual course of events.

Next to them he found Thomas Hooper and Peter Brown most acutely interesting. Professing great weakness and pain, Hooper had not once left his bed, but Peter came and went, always under guard, and had become a favorite with many of the refugees.

Giles Leedron did not relax his alertness, and on the third day he addressed Leland.

"I want," he said, "to ask your candid opinion of those newcomers."

"Chief," was the reply, "I dislike to give an opinion. Like them, I am a new arrival here, and I would not willingly prejudice you.'

"You have proved your devotion, doctor, and I want your judgment in this case. I beg of you, give it!" urged Leddron.

"Well, you shall have it frankly. Personally, Hooper is very distasteful to me. His smooth ways, his ultra-humility, his sanctimoniousness, his looks—even the glance of his peculiar eyes—one of gray and the other blue, you know—serve to repel me. Peter is different. At times he seems frank, honest and sincere, but let me assure you that the lad is deep as the profoundest canyon of Mount Taber. He may be capable of deception, and he has the cunning to hide it!"

"Is there more?"

"I have given you the side of the reader of human character. There is a medical and surgical side. From the first I have questioned whether Peter was in a faint when he first came to the valley. Also, I question whether the wound in his arm was made by an enemy. It is a long gash, but not a muscle of importance is severed. Were I desirous of making a wound that would show greatly, but, at the same time, not injure its bearer, I could cut none better than Peter's. I wonder if his was made by a scheming surgeon?"

Leedron leaned forward in intense interest.

"Well?" he questioned, almost in a whisper.

"Next, Hooper. He is gashed and bruised, and looks a hard-hurt man, but his injuries are superficial. They ought not to keep a hardy man in bed—yet he sticks there, while Peter goes abroad with his big, sharp, intelligent eyes ever alert. He is candid, friendly, even childish of manner—but is he not an atom too childish for so mature a boy?"

"Doctor, you stagger me!" confessed Leedron, changing color.

"If I wrong these people heaven forgive me, but——"

"But you only put my fears into words."

"I have before asked you to let me go to the valley to see if I can learn of them. When I was there I asked Dr. Appleby if there was any general news, and he said no, but it may be different now."

"In one way it would; your recent deceit with Appleby is known. No, doctor! —to go would mean your death. We can only wait and watch, and guard our Hill people as best we can."

"Is the entrance where man and boy entered duly watched?"

"Better than that! It was a long passage, and narrow in most places. Long ago we shaped a suspended rock ready to be dropped by the power of one man, to block the way. I dropped it before our guests were fairly inside. Only gunpowder can now force the passage. Also, our men watch there."

"Good! Then our only problem is, are the newcomers trustworthy?"

"Like you, I think the boy deep and am repelled by Hooper. His manner, his mismated eyes, his general style——"

The chief was speaking slowly, thoughtfully, when Asa Dickson came.

"Doctor," he said, "will you look in on Eldad Kendall? He is not feeling well."

Dale wheeled with abruptness that startled the messenger. A peculiar look was in the doctor's eyes.

"I'll go!" he responded briefly. "Wait for me, chief."

Ten minutes later he returned, his face set and grim.

"Eldad is down with fever!" he announced.

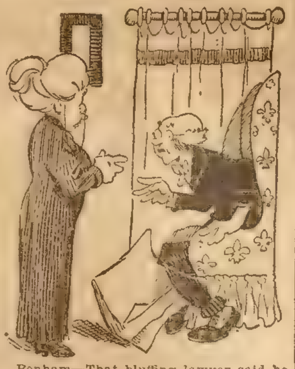
"Caught from the Harneys!" cried Leedron.

"No! Not time. It is another original case. Don't be worried, Leedron. We will fight this thing out, and fight to conquer!"

The continuation of this highly interesting story will be found in the Ledger issue of next week. Read it. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year.

* * *

A Reflection.



Benham—That bluffing lawyer said he would make it hot for me.

Mrs. Benham—How did he know that you suffered from cold feet?

* * *

Out for Inspection.

In Roumania once every year, a fair of marriageable girls is held. The girl, with her relations, gets into a wagon, which also contains her dowry—linen, furniture and household matters—and all set off for the fair.

When they arrive the girls are drawn up in one line and the men in another, with their parents behind them. Then if a young man likes the looks of any particular girl he steps out of the line, goes up to her and enters into talk with her, while his parents and her parents compare notes as to their possessions and their circumstances in life

If all is found satisfactory the couple are married then and there, and the bride is driven away by her husband to her new home.

The custom in Russia is very much the same. On Whitsunday afternoon the girl, dressed in her best clothes, is taken by her parents to the winter gardens in the nearest large town, where she meets a number of young men walking up and down on the lookout for wives.

The girl carries in her hand a silver spoon, a piece of embroidery, or some other valuable household possession, to show that she is a person of property, and the young man brings with him as many rubles as he has been able to save.

If the parents see that a young man is attracted by a girl she is promptly handed over to a woman who is a sort of marriage agent and whose business it is to introduce the couple and make arrangements about the dowry.

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THE YOUNG CASTAWAYS;

Or, Wild Adventures in Honduras

By LIEUTENANT JACK JUDSON

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CHAPTER IV.
SENTENCED TO THE MINES.

THE boy castaways had a right to be alarmed when they heard the heavy blows rained on the door of Dick's room.

They knew that they had been tracked to the house by Senor Goralo's minions and and they expected nothing less than the demolition of the door if they refused the band admission. What would follow their arrest they could readily guess.

Dick set his teeth hard when he laid his hand on the key and turned it slowly in the lock.

The next moment the portal was pushed inward and half a dozen merciless looking men confronted them.

"Come in," said Dick with the best [illegible] uld assume.

[illegible] came Joao in the lead, and at [illegible]s heels the big black dog which Tom [illegible]d floored with the office stool.

"[illegible]?" Dick asked.

[illegible] stood side by side, show[illegible] mien that they were ready [illegible] consequences of their adven[illegible] whatever these might be.

"[illegible] Joao, pointing to Tom. "[illegible] You two are not to be [illegible]. It's against the senor's [illegible]

[illegible] nearer his companion, but [illegible] grim-faced Spaniard shot out and ruthlessly separated them.

"Back to your quarters, dog striker!" cried Joao, as his face grew darker.

In less than a second Tom was dragged away and was being hustled from the room by the hands of his arch enemy.

Into the narrow street he was pushed with the whole pack at his heels, and as the darkness surrounded him he half expected a knife thrust in the back, but none came. They seemed to be saving him for the vengeance of the monster of Honduras.

The boy of the Silver Moon had time for reflection when once more he found himself in the solitude of his own room. He had roused the ire of his master and he expected condign punishment on the following day.

That the house was now guarded to prevent his escape he well knew, and there would be little sleep for him that night. At any rate, he had rejoined the friend of his schoolboy days, finding him in captivity, and he resolved that they must stand together against the villainy of the mine owner.

It was a long night for the boy castaway.

At the first flush of day he went to the solitary window of his chamber and looked out.

Not far off stood two villainous looking Meztizos, armed with muskets, and near them crouched a huge hound capable of tearing one to pieces.

It was a sight that for a moment caused his heart to sink within him.

The warm tropical sun was rising above the nearest hills when a man in strange looking uniform appeared in view, and Tom made ready for the ordeal which he knew was at hand.

He was escorted from the house and conducted away, crossing the plaza where half a dozen hounds were already enjoying the shade of the leafy palms.

Senor Goralo lolled in his wicker chair on the veranda of his storeroom.

Tom was led on till he was in the man's presence, whereupon the tyrant raised his eyes and studied him for a minute.

"You have disobeyed my commands, little senor," he said in his usual tones. "You were out last night?"

"Yes, I went to Pedro's house."

"More than that. Captain Joao informs me that you killed one of the dogs."

Tom started. Then the dog which he had struck at the mouth of the narrow way was dead. This, he knew, did not help his case any.

"The dog was about to leap upon me!" Tom ventured, "and to save my life I struck."

"You deal a terrible blow, little senor. The dog was a very strong beast."

A smile was perceptible at the Spaniard's mouth.

"More than this even," Goralo went on. "You also struck Captain Joao with the stool."

"He had launched the other hound upon me."

Senor Goralo coolly lit a fresh cigar and sipped at the wine on a small table at his side.

"I shall have to discipline you," the Spaniard said, after a little pause. "I can have no mutiny in my dominions. You are sentenced to a month in the mines."

Tom's face went pale at the thought. A month in the mines under the sleepless eyes of men like Captain Joao meant death.

"You will be taken to El Toro tonight," continued the monster. "Take him back, captain."

Tom was whirled on his heels by Joao and escorted away. He had obtained a glance at Dick at work and a hasty look had passed between them.

Already he had felt the power of his brutal master. It was a quick journey back to his quarters. Tom entered the house with his heart in immeasurable depths in his bosom and threw himself for a moment upon the couch in one corner of the room.

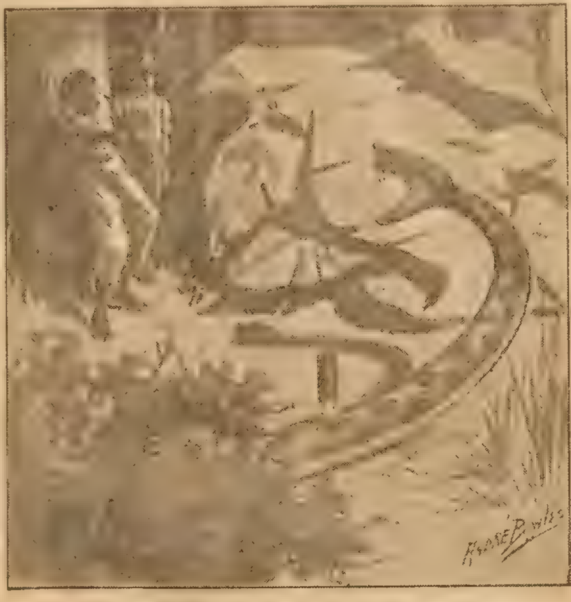
Outside all was bright and beautiful. Birds of brilliant plumage were caroling in the tropic trees and children were running hither and thither in the greatest glee.

Suddenly there came in sight an odd looking vehicle drawn by two spotted ponies. Lying back in the open carriage was a young girl at sight of whom Tom glued his face to the window pane and looked with all eyes.

"It is Marcelle," he said to himself. "She is the young American girl who, like Dick and myself, is in this spider's web."

As the turnout approached Tom had an excellent view of it all.

The girl was beautiful, but deep in her eyes, as the boy castaway could see, was a look of sadness. The ponies were moving at a slow gait and following them came three men who were enacting the role of guards.



Tom saw the weapon pin the monster to the ground.

All this passed in a minute, but Tom had seen enough. He noticed that the girl sent a swift glance toward his window, but whether she had seen him or not he could not conjecture.

The long, hot day passed with the boy a prisoner in his own quarters. His meals were brought to him by a Carib who spoke not whilst he watched him eat, and amid profound silence the remains were taken up and carried off.

When the first shadows of night came, Tom was brought face to face with four slaves who proceeded to escort him to a cart outside the house. He was placed in this on a rough seat and when one of the four had taken a seat beside him, the vehicle moved off.

He was on his road to the mines!

In the forest beyond the town the night seemed to increase in darkness. There were wild sounds among the tall creeper-covered trees and Tom's ears were tingled by a series of loud noises, which seemed as though a thousand animals were keeping up a savage serenade.

He was soon to learn from whence those terrible noises came.

It seemed to him that the lonely journey would never end. The men beside him spoke not. The ones who guided the cart through the gloom now and then spoke harshly to the black bullocks, but that was all.

All at once the cart came to a halt. Tom caught sight of a little fire, and then the forms of several men obstructed his vision and he knew he had reached El Toro.

As his limbs had not been bound, which was not necessary, for Tom would not have entrusted himself in that wild region for the world, he got out of the cart and looked around.

Then he perceived that he had reached a mine, but he had not long to inspect his surroundings, for he was led forward and turned over to a giant stripped to the waist.

A few words in low tones passed between this native and the commander of Tom's escort.

Suddenly Tom felt a hand at his own and a bit of folded paper was thrust into his grasp.

The boy castaway clasped it eagerly and hid it in his pocket.

He dared not open it and read its contents. No doubt Dick had bribed one of his guards to convey the message, and Tom could not think of compromising his friend by exhibiting the friendly letter.

Several rude huts, built of logs and leaves, stood at the mouth of the gold mine and Tom was led to one of these and thrown inside. Then at last he was left to himself once more.

The interior of the hut was darkness itself.

He could not see his hand before his face, although now and then he caught a glimpse of the little fire about which the natives reclined in many attitudes.

At last the imprisoned boy threw himself on a heap of leaves in the corner of the hut and tried to sleep. He had nearly sunk into a doze when something which sent a chill through every vein crawled slowly across his face.

Tom sprang to his feet with a cry and retreated to the farthest corner of his tropical dungeon.

The reptile did not molest him, but the experience was enough to drive sleep from his eyes.

Morning dawned at last. With the first roseate streaks Tom went to the one lone window in the hut and took the message from his pocket.

It was but a bit of paper, carefully folded, and as the boy opened it his heart came into his throat with excitement. What had Dick written?

But it was not the writing of a boy. Tom saw this at once and this made his heart beat faster.

"My Poor Fellow Countryman," the castaway read as he held his breath. "You have come, like myself, into the web of the Honduran spider. May heaven pity you! I am Marcelle De Lorme, the child of a rich American and I fell into Senor Goralo's hands a year ago. If you try to escape without knowing the trails of these forests you will perish. If you remain in the hands of your taskmaster you will die. In union there is strength. You can trust Segara. I have sent this to you by him. He is a friend. He hates the tyrant as I hate him. Bide your time. Let us hope that some day the skies will be bright and that we shall see our homeland once more. Never despair. Keep a stout heart in your bosom and mayhap some day we shall turn the tables on the monster of Honduras. MARCELLE."

Tom read the message again and in the dim light of day.

He was to trust Segara, but how should he know the man?

The natives all looked alike to him, dark-faced, grim and merciless, but from that moment hope never left the boy castaway's heart.

Pressing Marcelle's message to his lips, Tom concealed it on his person and awaited events.

In a little while the door of the hut was thrown open. A tall native beckoned him forward. When he went out into the light a pick was placed in his hand and he was marched into the mouth of the mine with a lot of Caribs.

In the darkness a hand found his wrist and settled there. A thrill of hope fluttered Tom Fallon's heart.

Had he already found Segara?

CHAPTER V.
TOM HAS ADVENTURES.

If Tom had looked for the owner of that friendly hand he would have seen no one, for the mouth of the mine was as dark as a wolf's throat, but he put out his other hand and returned the pressure.

Ten minutes later he was at work in the depths of the mine, the darkest corners of which were relieved by the torches of Senor Goralo's minions. He toiled in silence, though he attempted to single out Segara from among them.

When night came he was thrust back in the hut and guarded.

For some days this daily work went on. What was happening in Esperanza Tom did not know. More than once he thought of attempting to free himself from this slavery, but he remembered Marcelle's letter and beat down the desire. Some day the right time would come.

At last his toil lessened. He was permitted a little exercise above ground during the day. At all times he was closely watched and he did not attempt to wander far.

"Come, little senor," said one of the natives one day. "We will see the big woods."

Tom's heart took a leap at the thought and he and the man left the camp.

The fellow could speak fair English.

He directed Tom through the forest and at last they stood upon a hillock from which they could see the waters of the Caribbean.

"Ah!" cried the boy castaway. "The sea! the treacherous sea!"

A strange look came into the Carib's eyes.

"Yonder is where I was thrown upon

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the beach," Tom continued, pointing to a certain spot. "I wonder if the sea gave up anything but my unfortunate self?"

"We will see, little senor."

Boy and man pushed forward and were soon racing toward the beach.

The tropical sun shone brightly upon wave and shore and Tom halted and looked around.

At once he espied an object lying half buried in the sand and he led his companion to it.

"One of the ship's chests!" he exclaimed, pointing to the thing at his feet. "It is the arms chest of the Silver Moon. We did not expect to fight, but my uncle had the arms put on board in case we should need them."

Tom and the Carib by main force pulled the heavy chest from the sand, the man looking at it with a gleam of satisfaction in his dark orbs.

"What sort of arms in there?" he asked.

"Nearly all kinds," answered Tom. "There are revolvers, repeating rifles and knives." Then he paused a moment. "Just the sort one would need for a little rebellion."

He discovered that his words were not resented, for the Carib was staring stolidly at the chest.

"Open it," he said at last.

This was no easy task, but with the aid of their knives they broke the lock and Tom threw back the lid.

"Not a single thing injured by the sea!" he exclaimed, looking up into the man's face.

Segara—the Carib was Marcelle's friend—stooped beside the chest and began to fumble the weapons.

"Good things to fight with, little senor," he said with the delight of a child.

"Fine!" cried Tom, with rising enthusiasm. "With these we could stand off Senor Goralo's whole army."

"He not got many soldiers," was the reply. "Capitan Joao is the head leader."

"I thought so," Tom observed. "They have no such arms as these in Esperanza?"

Segara shook his head.

There were half a dozen revolvers in the chest, some repeating rifles, a plentiful supply of ammunition for all, and a lot of keen-edged knives for close fighting.

"We hide big chest. Mebbe some time come good, little senor," answered Segara with a grim smile.

"I hope it may."

The chest, weighted as it was with its contents, resisted the combined force of the two, but the arms were taken out, when the chest was dragged back from the beach and secreted where the eyes of the keenest native could not see it. After this the weapons were replaced in it and Segara, making the sign of the cross on his bare bosom, swore never to betray the hiding place.

Having buried the rich find, Tom and the Carib went back to the shore. A good deal of the Silver Moon's cargo had been given up by the sea.

Several bodies had also come ashore, but Tom hunted in vain for the corpse of Captain Jonas.

They had turned from the beach and were making their way back to the mine when Tom stopped and uttered a little cry.

"Look!" cried he, half under his breath, as he pointed at an object on a limb overhead. "What terrible eyes, Segara!"

The next moment the whole forest rang with a shrill cry and the owner of the eyes leaped straight at Tom and bore him to earth.

The boy castaway was in the grip of a jaguar!

This great cat is the king of the forests of Honduras, and, though not as large as the tiger, he is equally as fierce and deadly.

Segara seemed frozen into a statue at Tom's peril, for he crossed himself and for a second seemed incapable of assistance.

As for Tom, he was fighting off the beast with all his might, but being underneath, he had little chance of success. He felt the hot breath of the king jaguar in his face and the sharp claws had torn his flesh in no gentle manner.

Suddenly, with a yell intended to frighten the jaguar, Segara sprang forward, knife in hand. Uttering maledictions on the brute he threw himself upon his back and began to deal blows in rapid succession.

At once the howling beast left Tom to scramble to his feet and plunged at the new foe.

The half-naked Carib stood his ground and awaited the attack. It was a sight [illegible] sent Tom Fallon's blood like racing [illegible]es through every vein.

The bloody mouth of the maddened animal seized Segara's left arm with its horrid teeth and then the long knife of the Carib was buried to the hilt in its side.

A Carib is one of the coolest wild beast fighters in the world, and as the dying jaguar droppped to the ground Segara turned a victorious face toward Tom.

All this had hardly occupied the space of a minute.

"Little senor much hurt?" asked the native, springing to Tom's side, forgetful of his own wounds.

"I'm all right!" cried the boy castaway, "but look at your arm."

The Carib laughed derisively and then cast his eyes upon the quivering terror on the ground.

Upon examination the boy castaway discovered that his hurts were not serious, and leaving the jaguar to be picked by vultures, the two turned their faces toward the mine.

Tom now felt that he could rely upon his new found friend.

All at once he turned toward him and laid one hand gently on his arm.

"Would you fight for your freedom, Segara?" he ventured.

"Would a caged jaguar fight to get out of the Carib's trap?" was the reply.

"Of course he would," Tom said. "That's natural, you know. But you serve Senor Goralo."

"Man killer!" flashed the Carib as his eyes got a sudden ferocity.

"I know he must be. But tell me, Segara, how did the fair senora come into the web?"

"The man spider stole her. Captain Joao helped. It was long ago."

"But where was she when they took her?"

"She had come down to this country with a little party. All were killed but the bird in the cage."

"The monster!" ejaculated Tom. "How does he treat her?"

"He dare not treat her badly," was the reply. "La Senora is armed and she keeps Senor Goralo at a distance."

"Good for Marcelle!" cried Tom. "I know she pines for home——"

"So does the caged eagle, little senor. He is always wanting to get back to his mountain peak."

They walked a little farther in silence.

"Look, little senor!" abruptly exclaimed the Carib. "See how the little hare runs."

Tom followed the Carib's extended arm and beheld a hare running with all his might through the forest.

"What has scared him?" he asked.

No answer was necessary, for the next moment there came into view a long, darkish thing that swept through the bushes with an ugly looking head erect and scales flashing now and then in the sun. It was a serpent full fifteen feet in length and almost as thick as the boy's thigh.

Tom at sight of the horrid monster drew closer to Segara.

"It is the bush master," whispered the Carib.

"The hare has stopped. He is worn out," gasped Tom, for the chased one had come to a halt a few feet away and was now crouching at the foot of a tree with eyes fixed upon the serpent.

"Nothing escapes the bush master," Segara said. "His bite is certain death, little senor."

The poor winded and frightened hare was at the mercy of the scaly terror of the wood. The bush master now lessened his movements and was slowly approaching his prey. Five feet from the animal he stopped and prepared to spring.

"Oh, for one of the rifles in the chest!" ejaculated the boy castaway.

By this time the Carib had taken his knife from his belt and was holding it by the very tip of the long blade.

Tom watched him eagerly.

All at once a streak of silver seemed to shoot from Segara's hand straight toward the bush master. It was the knife.

There was no sound of contact, but Tom saw the weapon sink into the monster and pin his body to the ground.

"Good! good!" cried Tom Fallon, clap-

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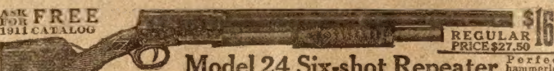

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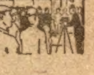

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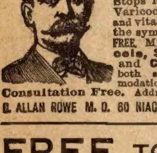

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ping his hands with delight. "We need no rifles when you are about, Segara."

The wounded reptile was writhing on the ground, twisting himself into many shapes, but the knife still held. The released hare had bounded away and was no longer seen.

The Carib moved forward with caution and, taking a stout limb, hammered the snake's head till life had left the repulsive body.

"Never catch hare!" laughed the Carib, finishing his task. "Never bite little senor, either."

Tom took a last look at the tropic monster and turned away with a shudder.

"Bush master like Senor Pedrez, he spares no one," whispered the Carib, and Tom saw the lips of companion close firmly behind the last word.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ALLY WORTH HAVING.

Dick Chaffee, or Pedro, as he was called in Esperanza, saw Tom depart for the mines with a saddened heart. He had put up with Senor Goralo's tyranny so long that he knew what that monster was capable of doing.

He feared that Tom might attempt to escape and thus bring down upon his head the full vengeance of his master. Dick knew nothing of the friendship of Segara, the Carib, who was in Marcelle's service, for he thought of all the natives as the abject minions of the Spaniard and could not conceive that one of them would dare disobey the commands of their lord.

As the days passed without bringing any news of Tom, Dick concluded that he was serving out his imposed sentence and receiving at least human treatment, though he knew he was closely watched by the lynx-eyed natives.

Therefore he was wonderfully surprised a week after Tom's departure to find a letter on his table when he entered his room after a day's toil.

He could not conjecture how it could have reached him, but he was not long seeking its contents.

It turned out to be a brief note from Marcelle, asking him to come to her house that night and at the same time it gave him certain directions how to reach her unperceived.

As he had never come in contact with Senor Goralo's fair captive, he resolved to accept the invitation.

When the hour named in the girl's letter came Dick presented himself and met with a cordial welcome.

The young castaway could not but express his wonder at the fact that he had not been watched, whereupon the American girl smiled and answered:

"I am not without friends in this spider's web. It may surprise you."

"It does," Dick returned.

"In the first place," continued Marcelle, "I have been a plotter ever since I was brought hither, but up till now I have been compelled to plan all by myself."

"From this hour," Dick said gallantly, "you will have assistance in that line."

"So much the better. I have heard from your friend Tom."

"What? Tom at the mines?"

"Yes," replied Marcelle. "He has had several adventures," and she proceeded to relate Tom's experience with the jaguar and the bush master, adding, in conclusion, that he would not attempt to escape.

"I had feared that Tom would make an attempt of that sort, though, from what I know of him, I could not believe that he would deliberately desert us and trust himself to an unknown wilderness."

"I assure you that he will do nothing of the kind."

Dick of course was anxious to know through what channel Marcelle had received her information, but she did not enlighten him.

"Matters are moving along satisfactorily," she went on, with another enigmatical smile.

He did not quite understand.

"I will try to convince you that we are not quite helpless," Marcelle continued.

She opened a door which led into a small dark room and bade Dick follow. Striking a light, the girl lifted a trapdoor in the floor and reaching down into it brought up a rifle. This she did again and again till five excellent weapons were lying on the table. Dick's eyes widened with amazement.

"The next thing," he said, "is to find some one to use those weapons."

"That will not be difficult. These rifles with the ones which Tom has——"

"With what Tom has?" repeated the astonished Dick.

"Yes. The ship's chest, washed ashore from the wreck of the Silver Moon, will be sufficient to arm our force."

"But Senor Goralo's minions?"

"It may be a fight all along the road to freedom," Marcelle said with resolution. "But I have something else to show you."

The weapons were restored to the secret place and the American girl led Dick into another room. A growl fell upon the boy castaway's ears the moment he crossed the threshold.

He recoiled at the sound and a light laugh rang from Marcelle's throat.

A sleek looking animal as large as a leopard bounded into the light and crouched at Marcelle's feet.

"A cougar!" exclaimed Dick.

He noticed the rounded head, the deep fierce eyes and the sleek tawny pelt of the formidable beast.

"Maximilian is one of our allies," smiled Marcelle. "He is the gigantic cat of Honduras and capable of crossing teeth with a jaguar."

"I wonder that Senor Goralo permits you to have a friend like that," Dick observed.

"He dared not cross me in this," was the reply. "This cat is worth any two of his bloodhounds."

"I should think so and the last animal I should care to meet in the forest."

The girl stroked Maximilian's head and he purred against her like a big kitten.

"This is the only thing Senor Goralo fears," she went on. "He was once attacked by a cougar near the mines and ever since has held the big cats in horror. Some day," and Marcelle's eyes assumed a vengeful expression, "I hope to see Maximilian pay the debt I owe the man-spider of Esperanza."

Dick continued to eye the animal and was glad when he slouched back to his corner at the command of his mistress.

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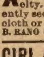

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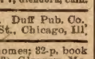

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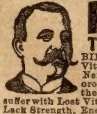

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"I have settled on none, for you know it takes more than one person to form a conspiracy. We have to reckon with more than Senor Goralo. There is the wretch Joao who is a half-Spaniard and the Carib Xedro who is a monster of cruelty and our master's foremost spy. Your friend will not be treated cruelly if he obeys at the mines. He will be back before his sentence expires, as I learn from one of my spies. We may look for him at any time."

"Good!" exclaimed Dick. "When Tom returns the details of the plot will be formed?"

"That is it exactly, for three heads are better than two," observed the fair captive. "You are ready for the attempt?"

"I am ready for anything," was the exclamation which brought a flush of pleasure to Marcelle's cheeks. "Anything, even death, is better than this imprisonment."

"You keep the senor's accounts?"

"Yes."

"Then you know how much gold has been taken from the forest mines since you have been his slave?"

"More than three million in our money," Dick answered.

"I would have guessed as much. Then there are the pearls he has fished from the sea."

"He has robbed the Caribbean of some of the finest in the world."

"It is not to go on forever thus," Marcelle answered. "I have every reason to believe that this monster of greed and cruelty is intending to leave this country."

"I would not doubt it. The president of Honduras has no love for him."

"When Senor Goralo knows," said the girl. "He came here as an adventurer; here he has woven his golden web and what the sea did not bring him in the way of shipwrecks, he has wrenched from the hills."

"He comes not to see you?"

"Only twice since my captivity has he crossed my threshold," returned Marcelle. "Once he came to say that for two hundred thousand pesos he would liberate me and the second time he gave me the outfit which carries me, watched like a hawk by his minions, through the streets of Esperanza."

"What would you do if he were to offer insult?" ventured the boy castaway.

"Yonder is my answer!" and Marcelle pointed with a stern expression to Maximilian asleep on his bed of moss in his corner.

"It is answer enough," replied Dick.

"I wish," continued the girl," that you would bring me or send me secretly an estimate of Senor Goralo's full worth. The information may come handy some day. But we will discuss all this further when Tom returns."

In another moment Marcelle had taken from a mahogany secretaire a map of the country which she proceeded to open on the table.

Dick bent over it beside her.

"Here is Tegucigalpa, the capital of this country," said the beautiful girl, resting her finger on a certain place. "It is many leagues inland and the way to it swarms with dangers. Here is the open sea, not so dangerous a way, perhaps, but we might not be able to sight a vessel if we should reach the coast. I am sure that President Sierra has no knowledge of my situation. Should we reach the capital we would find a friend in him, but, after all, these people in high places are sometimes treacherous."

"Especially those of Spanish blood," said Dick, who was following Marcelle eagerly.

"Yes. Should we escape from Esperanza——".

"We will escape!" broke in Dick with enthusiasm.

"If we have courage and discretion," smiled Marcelle.

She folded the map and returned it to its hiding place.

"I will now wish you good night," she said. "You will not be spied upon going back. I have seen to that."

Dick held out his hand and Marcelle's rested in his palm for a moment.

"We must wait for Senor Tom," said she. "As I have already said, three heads are better than two."

"Always!" laughed the young castaway.

In another minute Dick Chaffee was beyond the house. His heart was beating as it had not beaten for months. The very air that fanned his cheeks seemed the balm of liberty. He felt new blood in his veins. He gazed upward at the vaulted heavens and saw the Southern Cross resplendent in its grandeur and it looked fairer to him than ever before. Not long any more would he toil for the man-monster of Honduras. No more would he live in the shadow of the lash and under the espionage of such villains as Captain Joao.

Liberty was near at hand!

He saw no lurking on his way back. He recalled Marcelle's promise that he should have no hated spies at his heels.

Once more beyond the threshold of his own little room he sprang to the window and looked out upon the moonlit plaza. Three figures turned from the house and disappeared. Were they friends or enemies? Unable to solve the puzzle, he threw himself upon the couch and dreamed of liberty.

(Continued next week.)

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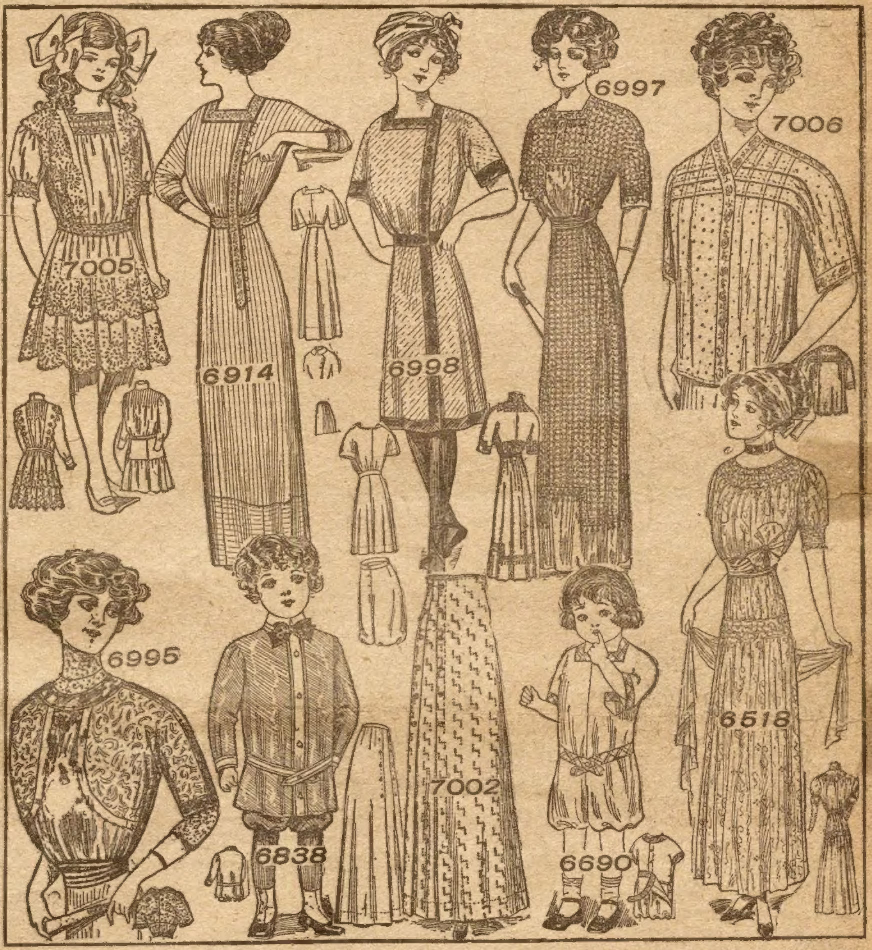

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AN APRIL JEST.

'Twas the sunshiny, showery season,
  When winter gives way to spring,
The sky and the dancing ocean
  Were bright as a bluebird's wing.
Bravely the tender flowers
  Were putting their blossoms forth,
When suddenly came a tempest,
  Of wind from the icy North.

With a hurry scurry of snowflakes,
  Which pelted the apple trees
And romped with the baby blossoms,
  Who thought they would surely freeze;
While the daffodils and the tulips
  Grew pallid and weak with fear,
And wished themselves safe in Holland,
  Till a pleasanter time o' year.

But the tempest sunk to silence,
  The bad little snowflakes fled,
And the sun shone out in splendor
  From clustering clouds o'erhead.
And the sweet south wind came laughing,
  In place of the north wind cool,
And cried, "Oh, you foolish flowers!
  'Twas only an April Fool!"

Cured.

Euphemia was one of the "goodest" children that ever were. She was quiet and seemly and pleasant and always doing useful things about the house. She was so good that sometimes her mother used to look at her and shake her head and say, "Oh, Euphemia, Euphemia, you're so good you frighten me. Don't you think you could talk a little or jump around or even break something the way most children do?" But Euphemia only made a polite curtsey and said: "I am afraid, mamma, I cannot."

"Well," said Euphemia's mother one day when the child had been tiptoeing about the house, "I think we shall have to send you to your grandmamma's to see what she can do for you."

"Yes, mamma," said Euphemia, politely. Euphemia never said more than was necessary.

Accordingly, Euphemia went to visit her grandmother, who lived in a wide, old-fashioned house with a comfortable path leading up to it, bordered on each side by box bushes. The morning after her arrival the child was walking decorously down this path, when she noticed on one of these bushes a queer seed-pod. It was shaped like a little pill-box, and when Euphemia shook it it rattled most enticingly. Now, Euphemia was filled with a great curiosity to know what made it rattle, and so she broke open the seed-pod and found inside five little round nuts. Of course the next thing she did was to eat one of the nuts, and as it tasted good she finished all five. Then she ran into the house, jumping, shouting, laughing and talking as hard, as she possibly could. Euphemia's grandmother, who was dozing in the sun, awoke with a start.

"My goodness gracious me!" she cried, rubbing her eyes. "Is that my Euphemia? What has happened to the child?"

"Oh, grandmamma!" cried Euphemia, "I've been eating some nuts off the box bush."

"What kind of nuts?" her grandmother asked. And when Euphemia told her, "I thought so!" she cried. "It's not the box bush, but the chatterbox bush you've been eating the nuts of. It's a very rare plant and only blooms once in two hundred years, thank goodness."

"I'm so glad I ate it!" cried Euphemia, dancing merrily around the room.

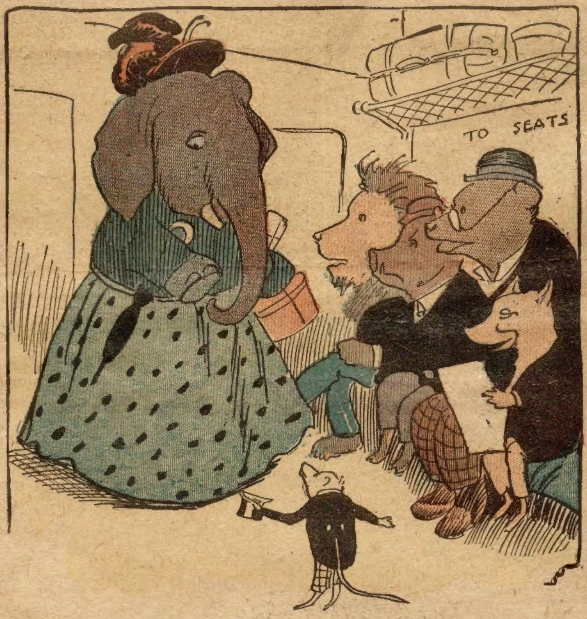
"Well, perhaps after all it was a fortunate thing that you ate it," said her grandmother. "If it will make a quiet child as noisy as this, just think what would have happened if a noisy child had eaten it!"

And that's how Euphemia was cured.

He Fixed Them.

One of the oldest jokes of the world is the joke about the cat that howls at night and keeps an entire neighborhood awake. It is a joke that does not seem especially funny to persons who have back fences on which cats like to travel, and if there is any place rather than another that a cat likes to visit after dark that place is the top of a fence. You can throw things at the cats when they begin singing, but the chances are that you will not throw with good aim. A better system for stopping the noise has been invented by a Milwaukee man. This man is an electrician. That tells almost the whole story. The details are that he ran two wires along the top of his back fence and connected them with an electric switch. To send the electricity through the wires it is necessary to have a connection through the switch, which is in the man's bedroom, and also between the wires on the fence. This second connection is supplied by the wandering cats. The man sleeps until the cats begin to sing. They awaken him. He looks out the window and sees them walking on the top of the fence. He is pretty sure that they are touching both wires. Then he turns the switch, and the electric current flows through the wires and also through the cats. The man says that the cats usually jump about six feet in the air. He says that after a cat has been shocked once it seldom comes back for another treatment. It does not approve of electricity. When all the cats in the neighborhood are educated the man will take down the wires and sleep in peace.

HIS GOOD BREEDING.



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Till Mousey, springing to his feet,
Politely offered her his seat!

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